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IONS ON
THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

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MEDITATIONS ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

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MEDITATIONS ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND
JOSEPH OSWALD SMITH O.S.B.
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MEDITATIONS

ON THE

PASSION OF OUR LORD

I—The Approach to the Garden of Olives

"Then Jesus came with them into a country place which is called Gethsemane."—*Matth.* xxvi, 36.

IT is difficult to say which is the first act of the Passion. I may take the first moment of our Lord's life, and there are many references to the Passion throughout His life; but the first physical act is this journey to the Garden where He was to accept His Passion, and begin the sufferings which were to end in death.

He went, therefore, from the town into a country place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit you here, till I go yonder and pray." And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad.

This deliberate coming of our Lord to the Garden, and His retiring even from His disciples in order to be more private in His prayer, is an example to all those whom He has called to follow Him in love. There was no need for Him to compose Himself to prayer, for at a moment He could have turned His whole soul to His Father, and no circumstance would have disturbed the complete attention and devotion

of His mind and heart. But because His religious could and would grow into careless habits, and go to their prayer without full deliberation, and in circumstances which would be a cause of distraction, He would show us the care He requires of us. He takes the two precautions before His prayer—He seeks a quiet place, and He separates Himself from His companions.

Am I careful in these matters? Whilst I am with the community at the prayer which is made in common, am I not on the alert for any distraction? Do I not allow ways, habits and peculiarities of my companions to rob me of the quiet I should seek? Is it not true that my time of prayer is often wasted, because I will not make the determined effort to recollect myself? The immediate preparation for prayer is at all times in my power. Continued attention is given only as a special grace to those who are very faithful in doing what is in their power. Everyone by the grace of God can begin prayer with attention. To make the effort required is one lesson of the first act of the Passion. I have part in the Passion of our Lord when I am particular to secure the surroundings suitable to my prayer. If I am careless and choose a place or a time in which I shall be assailed by distractions so far I am not joining myself to our Lord in His Passion.

But if I follow His example and am particular to choose a time and place in harmony with prayer I may be sure of the grace our Lord has purchased for me by His Passion. With very little effort I find it

easy to begin my prayer well when I have taken the precautions my Lord takes for my sake. I must separate myself from that business which is capable of engrossing my thoughts, and I must unite myself with our Lord just entering on His Passion.

How little have I thought of Thee, Lord, and of Thy example! How ready I have been to excuse my carelessness and my want of forethought when my prayer has been vapid or distracted! Has it not been through my own fault? I have not taken the opportunity of making my prayer in Thy company. Thou offerest me the support of Thy own prayer, but only if I will do my part. As Thou didst so carefully leave the town and retire to a quiet country place, as Thou didst leave even Thy disciples that Thou mightest be alone with Thy Father in prayer, so must I leave my distractions and the thought of human intercourse, and put myself as completely as I can in the presence of God.

Sometimes in saying prayers of obligation I find that a great effort is necessary, or my prayer is one long chain of distractions. This points to a necessity of obtaining a power of recollection which is not easily gained. But the use of my prayer will depend almost wholly on the exercise of this power. When I find that the circumstances are distracting, instead of taking them as an excuse for myself, I must know that it is all the more incumbent upon me to secure recollection in spite of the circumstances. If I can avoid them, well and good; if I cannot, I must follow Thee, dear Lord, in Thy concentration, and I must

learn in all times and places to look to Thy example. Thou wast ever recollected during Thy whole life. Thou didst not allow any distraction to rob Thee of Thy clear sight of the Father. Thou wilt help me, Lord, to a recollection which at present seems wholly beyond my powers, as Thou hast given to Thy saints the power in even the most occupied lives to keep the thought of Thee always in mind. Thou wilt so impress my heart with the love of Thee that nothing shall be able to take my love from Thee. I beg Thee in Thy mercy to add the gift of Thyself, that with Thy constancy I may keep my mind and my heart on Thee and the Father, so that nothing can take my attention from Thee, but that whatsoever I do may be done in Thy presence and in Thy love. Amen.

II—The Prayer in the Garden of Olives

"And He was withdrawn away from them a stone's cast; and kneeling down He prayed, saying: 'Father, if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from Me; but yet not My will but Thine be done.'"—*Luke* xxii, 41, 42.

THE actual prayer of our Lord is a great help to me. Not unfrequently the burden of work seems too much for me to bear. Our Lord has allowed Himself to feel the same hopelessness which is a trial to so many religious. Either the actual work given to me, or the circumstances of that work which make it a double burden, or the want of sympathy on the part of those associated with me, makes the burden of life too much for me, at least to my cowardice it

appears too much. The work our Lord was commissioned to do demanded from Him the loss of life, of reputation, the loss of faith in Him of many who had hitherto believed in Him. It was to be performed in the most open and public manner in the courts of Jerusalem and on the hill of Calvary; it was to be completed without one word of sympathy, except from the thief hanging beside Him and from the centurion after His death. There were indeed His Mother, Magdalen and the holy women, but their sympathy was silent. His disciples fled, one of them betrayed Him, and one denied that he knew Him. The burden indeed was greater than any I have to bear, and He encouraged Himself to take it up and carry it through by the same thought that He wishes me to have in mind when I am in difficulties over work given to me. "But yet not My will, but Thine be done."

Work which would be insuperable if undertaken by my own will and with my own strength becomes even easy when done according to Thy will and in Thy power, dear Lord.

Jesus would feel the impossibility of His passion if He rested on His own human will, and if He relied on His own human power to show me the folly of self-will and of reliance on my natural character. I find when this depression attacks me that I am relying too much on myself. Our Lord would have me remember that I am not alone, that God does not ask me to act only by myself, but that His will supports me, and His hand will work for the work I am

engaged in. He will not leave me to myself. At times He seems to do so as at this moment of prayer the Father seemed to leave His beloved Son. I must learn from Him to turn from myself, from my own will, my own power, to Him. Thus, as far as I find myself seeking my own will, I must put that effort aside and seek only God's will and God's power. I must subordinate my own will and my own energy to the will and the power of God, or my work will fail, and if it appear to succeed the success will not be permanent.

In my religious life I have a sure way for testing my reliance on self, and that is my attitude towards obedience. This is the means given me by our Lord when He gave me the call to religion. He gave me this means of leaving my own will or of purifying my will so as to make it conformable with the will of God. Therefore, our Lord would have an angel from heaven to comfort Him. I also have an angel from heaven, a messenger of the will of God in my superior, for, as my superior, he is, without doubt, a messenger from God. Thus does our Lord show me the manner in which I am to approach all work which I undertake for Him.

But He gives me another example, for, "being in agony, He prayed the longer." When I am relying on myself my depression in difficulty too often leads me to shorten my prayer and to allow the difficulty to become a mere distraction. Our Lord shows me that I must be more particular over the time of my prayer, and to increase rather than shorten it. How

completely our Lord teaches me the method He wishes me to follow! He would have me question my own will, follow more exactly the orders of authority, and be more exacting with myself over my prayer. Then may I rely on the will of God and rest on His assistance, working no longer by myself, but with the strong support of my God.

Lord Jesus, Thou wast thinking of me in Thy agony in the Garden, and teaching me how to act. Give me, I beseech Thee, the grace to understand and to follow Thee in Thy resolution. Teach me to use the means Thou proposest. Teach me to leave myself and my own will and to give myself entirely to Thine. Help me to submit myself to the authority Thou hast placed over me. Let me be comforted by Thy angel, that with Thy generous spirit I may go forward with the work Thou hast given me to do. In Thy mercy let me not abandon my prayer in times of difficulty, but, after Thy example, the harder the work the more instant let me be in prayer, that Thy power may strengthen my weakness, enabling me to work in Thy service for the good of souls. Amen.

III—The Sweat of Blood

"And His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground. And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow."—*Luke* xxii, 44-45.

THE sweat of blood shows me the terror of the forecast of the passion. It took all the resolution of our Lord's nature, supported by the messenger from

heaven, to sustain Him when His Father offered Him the work for which He was sent. His divine will never wavered, but His human will which had accepted the sacrifice, now that it was actually offered, recoiled, and His human nature rose up against the offering of Himself. The struggle to submit and calmly accept the will of His Father was so violent that the life-blood was forced from His veins, and through the pores of His skin, and stood as sweat upon His brow and fell upon the ground. Here our Lord shows me the repulsion I feel in facing difficulties which will cost me self-sacrifice. He would feel to the utmost all the difficulties, and force His human nature to submit. He lets me see the struggle, that I may know His sympathy in my own.

There is often in my life a call of God to endure some pain, or to undertake some commission for the sake of others which will entail sacrifice on my part, and my first impulse is to resist when our Lord would have me brace myself to accept and go through with His work. Whilst it is at a distance I do not find it hard to accept, but in the very excitement of the work the acceptance is more difficult. I tell myself that it is not necessary for me to do this work, others will take it up, but our Lord lets me see that He wishes me to do it. No doubt He will find others to accept it if I refuse, but I shall not be joined to Him, I shall not be His soldier if I fail Him in the time of need.

Give me a share in Thy courage, dear Lord, that

when time of trial comes I may not fail. Thou hast allowed each of Thy servants to grow up with a natural objection to certain work, and at times Thou askest each to contradict that objection, and only by doing so to accomplish Thy work. Thou askest one who is naturally shy to face concourses of men, in spite of the effort it costs him. Thou askest another who is naturally keen and full of life, and with a natural inclination to lead others, to take up the yoke of obedience, and to leave all public work absolutely to the will of another. Thou givest us natural tastes which enter into Thy work chiefly by being crossed. The completeness of my union with Thee will greatly depend on the generosity with which I am willing to act against my natural inclinations. I do not clearly see why Thou dealest with me in this way, but Thou showest me in Thy own example that I am to expect this call from Thee. Thou showest me I am not to think that because I feel the aversion I am therefore unfaithful to Thee, but only when I refuse to do as Thou wishest me, though the doing of it will demand from me the courage to overcome the shrinking of nature.

Again, Thou teachest me that I must not lose heart because after many resolutions I find my courage apparently to fail in some particular circumstance, for Thou didst find that even Thy divine union with Thy Father did not prevent the shrinking of Thy human will in the moment when the full chalice of Thy passion was presented to Thee. Thou didst allow the natural shrinking of Thy human

nature from pain and death to have its full effect on Thee, and when that effect had made Thee shrink from the sacrifice, Thou didst will to make an obedience to Thy Father's will; Thou didst make even Thy shrinking human nature submit, and the sweat of blood shows me the reality and the intensity of Thy victory.

Then, still human, Thou didst turn to the sympathy of Thy friends for comfort, and going to the three favoured disciples Thou didst wish them to offer to suffer with Thee, but this sympathy was not given to Thee. Thus our Lord and Master allowed Himself to feel the bitterness to which He subjects so many of His servants. In the time of real trial they stand alone; either none of their associates join themselves with the sufferer, because they do not appreciate the object for which he is ready to suffer, or they do not understand the suffering. In both these ways the disciples failed to sympathise with our Lord, hence they were no support to Him in His agony. It was thoughtful and kind of our Lord to subject Himself to this trial which He knew would be the experience of so many engaged in His work. He did this that when the trial comes upon me I may join myself to Him and suffer with Him; and though I receive no sympathy from others I may still persevere.

Our Lord would teach me also to understand the views of my companions, that I may, if He wishes it, bring some comfort and support in the day of trouble. How can I complain of the want of sympathy on the part of others, when I take so little pains to appreciate

the difficulties of others? Our Lord knew and fully weighed all the feelings of His disciples.

IV—Our Lord Finds the Disciples Asleep

"And going away again, He prayed, saying the same words. And when He returned, He found them again asleep (for their eyes were heavy) and they knew not what to answer Him. And He cometh a third time, and saith to them: 'Sleep ye now, and take your rest.'"—*Mark* xiv, 39, 40, 41.

WHEN our Lord found that there was no comfort for Him in the disciples He went back to His prayer. Still, the sensitive nature shrank, and the only strength He obtained was from His Father's will.

In religion our Lord demands from most the same trial, and offers the same support. It is the experience of all who undertake work for God that when real trial comes, the soul stands alone as far as human comfort is concerned. Before He brings great trial upon a soul God seems invariably to wean that soul from reliance on anyone but Himself. Yet He does not condemn the seeking of companionship; He Himself sought it. This is one of the weaknesses of our nature which our Lord allowed to Himself. It is natural to man to seek help and the comfort of appreciation of work undertaken or of the trial borne, but our Lord lets me see that, though natural to man, it will rob the work God gives me to do of its completeness if I rest upon this sympathy; therefore, in my case as in His own, though He allows the weakness, He does not permit it to be satisfied.

Even a second and a third time He seeks the support of His disciples, but He returns to the only complete support of the soul—"Yet, not My will, but Thine be done." In the repetition of His prayer He teaches me the persistence He would have me to practise in prayer. To persuade myself that it is necessary for my mind to seek for other prayer than that which suits the occasion He shows me is a mistake. I must not be afraid that I am not praying fervently if the same words come to my mind, so long as I can say them genuinely. The difficulty of repetition comes not so much from the repetition itself as from my want of really meaning the words I repeat. As our Lord fully meant the words He said, it was kind of Him to repeat them over and over again, that in the like circumstances I should not distract myself to find words in my prayer when the words which suit me have come to me.

He finds the disciples asleep, and they know not what to answer Him. His first word is to Peter: "Canst thou not watch one hour with Me?" Our Lord seems to complain, yet we know that the labours of the day, the long waiting about the temple for the buying of the lamb and the slaying of it, the further waiting to have it offered on the altar, the excitement of the Last Supper, the long discourse, both in the supper chamber and in the walk to the Garden, the very obedience to our Lord to sit down and wait, would all account for Peter's weariness, yet because He knew that many would feel the same impossibility to keep awake, and often find difficulty

in giving full attention to my difficulties and my needs, our Lord allowed Himself to feel what I so often feel when others might be more helpful to me in my need. Still, He shows me that I am not to be turned from doing what I know to be the will of God, because others are not interested and do not assist me. Even this complaint to Peter He makes in love of me, for after the resurrection He allows to be seen what He knew of Peter's love, and how far He was willing to entrust His work to the sleepy disciple. Here He shows me it is not a mark that love is not genuine, because it does not answer when I seem to have most need of it.

Thou teachest me much, Lord, that concerns my religious life in this act of Thy passion. Grant that I may learn Thy lesson. Give me the grace to understand the meaning Thou wishest me to take from Thy passion, and to see how closely every act of Thine is capable of helping me in my own difficulties and trials. Let Thy love and Thy care for me be apparent to me, not only as a doctrine, but as a force to enter into my very life. Thy passion, dear Lord, is not only meant to work my redemption once and for all, but to have part in every moment of my striving. The small details are meant to be to me a help, an instruction, a support. Give me the grace to read the story in this way. Let it help me to bear the want of sympathy that drives me to repine. Let it lead me as it led Thee to the only sure support of Thy divine will.

Be Thou in Thy holy passion the food of my

prayer, the support in weariness, the giver of all honesty, the purifier of my heart, that the love of my heart may burn with the same intensity with the love of Thee and Thy Father. Let not this centre of all that is noble and true be for me of no avail. Let not this treasury of all virtue be closed to me, but, in Thy mercy, give me the support and the stimulus of Thy passion, that in all things my life may be after the model Thou hast given me. Amen.

V—The Band with Judas

"Judas, therefore, having received a band of soldiers and servants from the chief priests and the Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons."—*John* xviii, 3.

THE care that Judas took to cover his treachery is full of warning for us. He had no direct communication with Pilate, but went to the chief priests. They, no doubt, obtained from Pilate some of the Roman soldiers and, joining to them their own guard, called by St. John the servants of the high-priest, sent them with Judas to receive from him their enemy. Judas thus covered his treachery by obtaining the sanction of both the secular and the ecclesiastical authority. The time of his betrayal was carefully chosen. He knew that the Last Supper would be finished, and that our Lord, according to His custom, would retire into the Garden of Olives, that He might be alone in prayer during the night. He wanted to avoid the company of the Apostles. They did not

suspect him. None of them except St. John and St. Peter had even a hint of what Judas was about to do. Still, as some of the disciples might have accompanied our Lord, Judas would be on the safe side. It was necessary that he should be able to see distinctly, therefore he would have the men carry lanterns. There might be some little resistance on the part of the disciples; he had heard them say only a few days before: "Let us go and die with Him." He knew well the courage of Peter and the boldness of John and James. He warned the soldiers to take arms, and, lastly, he would have them bring ropes to secure our Lord. He had known Him escape from their hands when sought before. The word of our Lord to Judas, as he left the supper chamber, confirmed him in the hope that at last He would submit and allow Himself to be taken, but still it was better to be safe. Thus we see Judas taking great care over his treachery. Even now his chief right of approaching our Lord is the friendship his Master had given him. And Jesus went forth to meet His betrayer. He did this apparently to show His faithful disciples that it was not because of force that He was to deliver Himself up, but of His own deliberate will. The suddenness of His appearance startles Judas, and he is not ready with his prepared greeting. Many of the soldiers know not Jesus, and when He asks them, "Whom seek ye?" they answer, "Jesus of Nazareth." When our Lord answers, "I am He," the whole band falls back, and falls to the ground. Whether this effect was produced by the miraculous

power of God or was the simple effect of the courage of our Lord we do not know. In either case the fact brought home to the disciples that our Lord was not taken against His will. The time for His passion appointed by the Father had come, and though it means His submission to the soldiers, He lets me see that it is deliberate and wilful submission.

He had something else to bring home to us, namely, that at all times He was careful of and merciful to the weaker of His disciples. Thus, He asks the soldiers once more: "Whom seek ye?" and when He is answered, "Jesus of Nazareth," His words in reply are: "I have told you that I am He; if then you seek Me, let these go." Our Lord is always gentle with weakness, but He urges all to have the courage which He Himself shows to accept the sufferings God sends to us with full deliberate submission as coming from the hand of our Father and Friend. He would have me imitate His own courage and deliberateness in my own life, and yet to have regard to the needs of others, that I may be courageous in facing suffering myself, yet be gentle with others, lest they fail in the time of trial. If He wishes me to sacrifice myself, He also wishes me to spare all whom I am consorted with.

I thank Thee, Lord, for the lesson Thou givest to Judas as he comes to betray Thee. Thou lettest him know that he would be powerless to betray Thee if Thou didst not give Thyself willingly into his hands. At the same time Thou showest him once more Thy gentle care of the disciples with whom he was

associated such a short time ago. Indeed, Lord, Thy example is of much importance to me. I am so inclined to expect too much from others, and to avoid all trouble myself. How often I am wanting in courage when a little boldness would enable me to accomplish Thy work. Thou askest me to pause when my selfishness has led me to place myself in an occasion of sin, and Thy word sounds in my ear: "Whom seek ye?" Oh, if I could answer at all times that I seek Thee, Lord, not to betray Thee, but to unite myself with Thee, it were well for me! Thou allowest me to see that I can unite myself to Thee most closely by my deliberate sacrifice for Thee. Give me, I beseech Thee, some of Thy courage, and give me also Thy own gentle care of others, that I may forget myself and think, even in the time of suffering and trial, of the needs of others. Thou wast ever kind and considerate for Thy disciples, even now when their weakness was about to separate them from Thee. Make me thoughtful for others after Thy example. Amen.

VI—The Kiss of Judas

"And forthwith coming to Jesus he said: 'Hail, Rabbi.' And he kissed Him."—*Matt.* xxvi, 49.

THERE have been those who have seen in the action of Judas the indiscretion of a fervent disciple trying to force his Master to declare Himself the Messias and the leader of the nation. In this view his act is not treachery, but indiscreet zeal. It is as

though he would put his Lord in such a position that He must either declare Himself or perish, and he would overcome that extremity of caution which stands so much in the way of the deliverance his Lord could bring to His nation. The words of Judas to the priests: "What will you give me, and I will give Him into your hands?" gives a very different motive.

There are others who look upon Judas as a traitor from the beginning of his apostolate. He was the only one of the twelve who was not a Galilean. He was almost the only one who had any experience of the dealing with money. He saw early in his apostolate how bitter was the feeling against our Lord. His natural inclination in this view was to advance himself, and he saw a means of at least gaining money by living with our Lord and disarming suspicion, so that at the opportune moment he might turn the hatred of our Lord to his own advantage.

The more common Catholic view is that Judas was called by our Lord, and answered the call in very much the same dispositions as the rest of the disciples, but did not correct his natural selfishness as the others did, but allowed even the kindness of our Lord to increase his self-love. Our Lord trusted him with the alms given to Himself and the disciples, and in this very trust gave him an opportunity to overcome completely his natural and acquired tendency to use all things for his own advantage.

Our Lord allows each one of us to be in circumstances in which the natural weaknesses may be overcome, and He does so, not as a temptation, but as a means of strength. Judas used this kindness to his own ruin, and instead of rising out of selfishness, he became more and more steeped in it, till it overcame his first loyalty to our Lord, and made him capable of treachery.

This last view of the fall of Judas shows each of us how we are to use the circumstances of life to control and ultimately to overcome our natural inclinations to evil, especially to selfishness. This most common of failings was the cause of the ruin of Judas. It may be the cause of mine. There is ever a danger in having to deal with money in religion, for there is thus given into my hands a means of self-seeking, either in supplying myself with things which the rest have not, or of giving things to others, and so gaining a good name from others by unlawful means. The dealing with money, unless very strictly guarded, may lead me to separate myself from the community, to take my own will as the test of all I do. Yet, on the other hand, a strictness about money is capable of ridding my life of all self-seeking. It is a trust from our Lord which I must use in the spirit in which He gives it to me.

The gradual deterioration of Judas from the fervour of his first association with our Lord to the baseness of His betrayal is a warning to me to be on my guard in time, not only in dealing with money, but in correcting the inclinations of nature in all other ways.

All these lead to selfishness in the long run. My carelessness about immoderate speech, my carelessness about merely natural affection may lead me in time to utter and sinful uncharity on the one side, and to a loss of the love of our Lord on the other. As Judas could blame Magdalen for her use of the precious ointment in Bethania, so his love of money robbed him of his love for his Master.

Lord Jesus, I thank Thee that Thou hast allowed Thy disciple to give me such a lesson. Thy love of Judas was shown in Thy correction of his uncharity towards Magdalen, and in Thy word to him in the very act of his treachery: "Friend, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" Thou didst know how completely his love of himself had taken charity out of his heart, and Thou didst know that the same self-seeking had robbed him of his former love of Thee.

Thou knowest, Lord, how fatal to me also will be the self-love of which I am guilty. Thou knowest how the uncharitable words I utter and the uncharitable thoughts I entertain prepare the way for treachery. Save me, Lord, from myself. Correct me as Thou didst not fail to correct Judas. Let not the want of charity, of which I am so frequently guilty, deafen me to Thy words of correction. Thou speakest, Lord, but Thou knowest how little I heed Thy voice. Thou knowest how ingrained in me is the habit of judging uncharitably. Oh, preserve me from myself. It is from the neglect of Thy warnings that I may become so full of self, that Thy love may find no room in my heart. Do not allow me so to

banish Thy love from me. There is no treachery that is not open to me if Thy love leave me. Leave me not, Lord. Take not Thy hand from me. I need Thy correction, I need Thy love as greatly as Judas did. In spite of my uncharitable thoughts and words let me still love Thee, Lord. Save me, for Thou alone canst save me from myself. Amen.

VII—Our Lord Heals the Wound made by Peter

"Then Simon Peter having a sword, drew it; and struck the servant of the High Priest, and cut off his right ear. And the name of the servant was Malchus. Jesus therefore said to Peter: 'Put up thy sword into the scabbard. The chalice which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?'"—*John* xviii, 10, 11.

IN this act our Lord exercises for the last time the healing by the touch of His hand. There is no occasion during His passion, because His hands are either bound with cords or used to hold the cross on His shoulders or nailed to the cross. Therefore, it is not possible for Him without miracle to use His hand again, but the last act of His free hand is to heal the wound made by one of His own disciples on the person of one of His enemies. He cures the wound given by His too eager disciple. He had just demanded that as they sought Him only, the soldiers and servants should not molest the disciples; but Peter would not so be separated from Him, and he had brought a sword and must use it foolishly.

I find that the unconsidered eagerness of His followers still endangers the peace and invites fresh

insults upon our Lord without doing any good to the cause they have in view. We may well believe that this attack on the part of Peter had only one effect—the binding of our Lord's hands. As an armed attack had been made upon the band, it was necessary to secure their prisoner.

Then I see how anxious our Lord is that the servant of the High Priest should not suffer, and, putting aside the disciple, He stretches out His hand and heals the wound. He will not have the servant suffer, though he was obeying an evil master.

Haste inconsidered often puts a community in a false position, and, though our Lord condones much folly, He does not promise that His Church shall not suffer from the thoughtless, hasty conduct of His servants. The calmness and the intense charity of our Lord is in striking contrast with the haste of His disciple. Once again and for the last time He exerts the power of healing which He had given to the body He had assumed, and, touching the ear of the servant of the High Priest, heals it. Perhaps Malchus was making himself objectionable, even more so than the rest. There are characters who are brave in company, and capable of much bluff when others are near, but cowards when alone. These are very provoking, especially to those who are not quite sure of themselves, like Peter. But here we have our Lord bearing with both Malchus and Peter, and kind to both the one who was provoking and to the other who hastily took provocation. The passion was not to be the result of either folly, but a perfectly deliberate

act on the part of our Lord and of the High Priests and rulers of the Jews.

So it is in religious communities. Our Lord wishes the sacrifice of self to be deliberate, and not to rest on merely thoughtless enthusiasm. Many wounds are given by unconsidered words, often in part untrue, which only result in greater difficulties for those who love our Lord and wish to have part in His life and passion. He alone suffers from the act of His disciple; the rest are only needlessly alarmed, and fly from Him, leaving Him to be bound and led bound to the court of the High Priest. What a depth of kindness towards those who attack us does our Lord show in this miracle! But more still He shows me the complete deliberateness with which I am to follow Him. Indeed the boldness or haste of Peter did not prevent him from flying and afterwards denying our Lord. It is not these spasmodic efforts which are blessed, but the perfectly contained and deliberate determination to do and to suffer all that the Father in His inscrutable designs puts upon me. This conduct will indeed bring me less honour before the crowd, and make me less remembered by men, but it will please my Father who is in heaven, and effect much more for Him and for the state of life to which He has called me than hasty attack and capitulation such as Peter made.

O Lord Jesus, I beseech Thee let me learn this lesson which Thou designest to teach me. Thou showest me Thy own firm will to go through deliberately with all that is before Thee — every

insult, every provocation. Thou takest upon Thyself the haste of Thy disciple, and, by bearing it, overcomest all. If Thou hadst encouraged Peter, there is no knowing what folly he might not have been guilty of. If Thou hadst resisted Malchus the deliberateness of Thy passion might have been taken away, and the disciples might have met their death before the Holy Ghost had come upon them. What a loss to the world would this have been! Whereas Thy kindness is a lesson for all time and an example to every soul that comes to Thee. Indeed, for the most of these Thou seemest to be more pleased with constancy than with great and heroic actions. Give me Thy own deliberateness, Thy own constancy, dear Lord. Amen.

VIII—Our Lord's Hands are Bound

"Then the band and the tribune, and the servants of the Jews, took Jesus, and bound Him."—*John* xviii, 12.

THIS insult, this want of trust, this treatment of our Lord as a dangerous prisoner may have arisen from Peter's attack on the servant of the High Priest. Though it was the natural way of dealing with a prisoner, it was especially galling to our Lord. He knew that He had accepted the death His Father wished Him to undergo for the salvation of the world. The bands with which they had bound Him could not restrain His power. The ropes would have fallen from Him at the first wish of His heart. They

did not as a fact restrain Him, but they were a sign that the ministry of His hands was rejected by His own people. Our Lord loved the use of His sacred hands, and allowed much of His ministry to be through them. Very often in His life we read of His stretching out His hand, of His touching the sick, of His taking the dead son of the widow of Naim by the hand, of His helping Peter when sinking, of His raising His hands to heaven in prayer, of His blessing little children, and of His blessing the few loaves of bread, multiplying them so that they satisfied a great multitude. He had just held in His hands the sacred elements which He had blessed and brake and given to His disciples. He had just washed the feet of the disciples, using His hands in that act of humiliation. And the response to all that loving ministry is that they bound Him. As our Lord loved to use His hands in His prayer, His blessings and His charity, so He felt the indignity of these bands. Yet He did not cease to offer His hands a few hours later to be pierced by the nails, that the instruments of His goodness might also have part in His sufferings.

Our Lord would have me sanctify the work of my hands after His example. I find that much of my service depends for its completeness on the work of my hands. Not unfrequently I cannot be used in our Lord's work, because I have not trained my hand to work for Him. So much of my power to work for Him depends on the care with which I use my hands. He showed me the kind use, and I am careless in my

imitation of Him. So also in my dealing with others, much depends on my gentleness and firmness in the use of my hands, as much of the influence I may have on others depends upon the grace or carelessness of my hands in prayer or in speech. Our Lord would teach me the lesson that His service does not disregard the small things of life, but is made perfect by loving attention to small things. No one has a greater soul than our Lord, and no one has ever been more careful in the little things that add joy to life.

Then it may be that our Lord allowed His hands to be bound to teach me that it is in subjection and restraint of the powers He has given me that I am to prepare my soul for His work.

Thou, dear Lord, didst not refuse to be bound that Thou mightest give the most free service of Thy passion and death for me. Thou wouldst be bound in Thy hands, because Thou wishest me to seek freedom of action by submitting myself to Thy bondage. Thou wishest me to be bound by loving subjection to Thee, not by sin or any evil habit. I have allowed the powers of good to be taken from me by submitting to the bondage of Satan; from this Thou freest me by Thy passion and death; to help me to work for Thee Thou submittest Thyself to the bondage of my meanness, and Thou allowest me to bind Thy hands to prevent Thee from helping me. Alas! I have so bound Thee in the past; oh, grant that I may never do so again. I have bound Thee by my selfishness, by my false liberty, for Thou wilt not assist a man who will not submit himself to Thee.

Thou hast called me to make the sacrifice of my own will in holy Religion, that my weak will may be strengthened by union with Thine. Yet after I had promised Thee my will, how often have I striven for my own! I have even persuaded myself that my will was a safe guide. I have thought little of Thy will, though I have appealed to it. I have said: "Let Thy will be done," but I have sought my own. Thou in Thy mercy hast refused to give me the freedom I sought. Thou hast raised up other wills more in conformity with Thine. I see it now, Lord, though I refused to see it in the past. In Thy mercy, continue, I beseech Thee, to thwart me when I seek my own will, but deign to make my will conformable to Thine, that I may work for Thee, not only with the force of the weakness of my own will, but with the strength of Thine. Let Thy blessing be upon all I do for Thee, not that I may be satisfied, but that, joined to Thee in the bonds of love, I may go forth as Thou didst to suffer and to die if it be Thy divine will. Let me never join Thy enemies in binding Thy hands that they can no longer bless me or help me. It will be my own fault, Lord, if Thou help me not. Let me not be useless in Thy service, because of my self-will. Amen.

IX—The Trial before Annas

"And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiphas, who was the high-priest of that year." —*John* xviii, 13.

THE trial of our Lord as a heretic and a seducer was naturally before the high-priest. In the year of our Lord's trial, as for many years before, there was another court, that of Annas who thirty-seven or thirty-eight years before had been high-priest. This man had by his power secured the election of no fewer than four of his sons to the office during that time, and was now again through his daughter powerful enough to hold a court of his own, independent of the high-priest to whom the soldiers had delivered their prisoner. They took Jesus to Annas for the first examination. This was an example of that intrusion of privilege which at times is a serious difficulty in religious houses. We may see in the fact of our Lord's submitting to it that He is in sympathy with those who find themselves faced by a like circumstance. In religion there are to be found those who cling to power they have once held as if it were their right. There are others who because of some office consider themselves lawful critics of all who are in authority, and are constantly arraigning others before them and judging harshly of their conduct. These things, which would be such a trial to His servants in religion, our Lord would submit to when taken to Annas first. So much had

Annas usurped the power of the high-priest, that He alone is mentioned by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. This gives me a view of the kind of annoyance to which our Lord was subjected. I can see the kind of usurped authority which is at times set up in a community. Annas questioned our Lord about His disciples and His doctrine. Our Lord answered him that He had spoken openly to the world, teaching in the synagogue and in the temple whither all Jews resorted. There were many who could answer these questions without putting Him to the indignity of this useless trial. Annas had no interest in our Lord, save as a political force. He inquired of our Lord's doctrine, not that he might know it, but that he might judge of its power to attract the multitude.

In like manner, there are those who set up a court in a religious community and judge of all in the light of community politics which, for the most part, do not touch the real essence of religious life. These courts concern themselves with lowering to a meaner level all that they judge, just as Annas saw our Lord's mission only as it affected the political situation in Jerusalem at the moment. If I am giving countenance to this kind of usurpation, I may well hesitate to bring indignity on our Lord, as I certainly do by my conduct. I may also judge at its true worth the pretensions of such a court. There are those who judge everything in the light of some pet scheme of their own, without regard to the principles of the religious life or the good of souls. Our Lord allows these, as He allowed the servants, to take Him

to Annas, though he had no claim to judge, except a usurped one.

Thou teachest me, dear Lord, that I am not to be influenced by such judges. Let them judge as they will; I will try to be sincere in my conduct and to do as my superior asks me. I will endeavour not to be turned aside from my religious principles by the position or the following of such self-constituted judges. At times the spirit of evil takes hold of good men and fills their minds with notions resting upon worldly wisdom, which disturb the peace of communities, and sometimes destroy religious life. He chooses men of standing; he brings estrangement between them and superiors. He almost always gives them a following; he finds some loud-mouthed follower who extols the virtues of the leader, and criticises the birth, or the manner, the learning or the life of the lawful superior. This criticism may be true, or it may appeal to facts which cannot be verified, and so have the appearance of truth, but it is almost always against authority. The weakness of the superior in this instance and that is appealed to, and the strong character of the usurping leader is extolled. Thus the poison of discontent is instilled and does its work to the destruction of the spirit of submission to authority, and the distinctive mark of the religious life is taken away.

Our Lord would give no satisfaction to Annas, because He wished those who will follow Him to be on their guard against upholding in any way one who sets himself up in the manner of Annas.

In Thy mercy, dear Lord, preserve me from so disturbing the peace of any family of Thine. Grant me the grace to put aside my own view if it it can be furthered only by such insubordination. Thou lovest peace, and because Thou lovest peace Thou allowest but one authority in Thy Church and one in each of the communities of Thy friends. Amen.

X—A Soldier Strikes Jesus in the Face

"One of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying: 'Answerest Thou the high-priest so?' Jesus answered him: 'If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou Me?'"—*John* xviii, 22, 23.

OUR Lord endured this insult, because the usual manner of the self-constituted court is force. The servants of Annas were on the alert for insult. The position of their master was such that they saw insult where there was none. Our Lord's answer to Annas that he had the same means of information as the rest, and by implication that he had no right to inquire into our Lord's conduct, was a most unpalatable truth to the servants whose duty it was to guard the assumed honour of their master. The truth was taken by them as an insult. The servant dealt with Jesus as he had been encouraged to deal with anyone who did not acknowledge the pretensions of Annas. Our Lord's answer is full of justice. He had at least the right to be judged before He is punished: "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou me?" Perhaps

our Lord knew that this servant had heard Him speak in the temple. He asked him if he remembered any word of evil, and if so to bear witness; but to stay his hand from striking till His words had been judged of as evil.

Our Lord is here teaching me to avoid violence when dealing with one who is accused. He would have me keep violence in check even in judging one of His enemies. He is protesting against physical violence, but He warns me also against violence in word. When I take a party view I know that the impulse is to be unfeeling for an adversary, not only outwardly, but in thought and word. It is the hard thought and the hard word as well as the physical force which keep up opposition. Our Lord shows me the danger of such self-constituted courts. They cause me, not only to judge unjustly, but very frequently to act without warrant, to use violence of word or deed, and always to exaggerate or to be guilty of false loyalty to a person in opposition to the one who has the right to claim my loyalty. If this assumption, such as Annas was guilty of, were rooted out of religious communities, how much more loyalty to our Lord would be shown! Help me, Lord Jesus, to be loyal to Thee, to be anxious for Thy honour, and to be gentle in maintaining it. Force and uncharity are ever against Thy spirit. I see, Lord, that if I attach myself to anyone who is in opposition to the superior Thou hast given me, there is a danger of taking a line which is not according to Thy design. There is a danger of undue violence creeping into my

heart, causing me to abuse him whom our Lord loves, and to use means which I would not consider honourable if used against myself. My Lord and my God allows Himself to be struck, because He will not acknowledge the usurped position of Annas. How much misunderstanding should I avoid, how much more gentle in my judgment of others I might become, if I had the courage to separate myself from the usurpation of an unauthorised leader in my own community!

At all times of His life our Lord is a model to all who live in community, but never more plainly than in His passion. I will try to study His example, that I may join Him in offering Himself for my sins and the sins of the world. If I separate myself from Him in His example shall I not run the risk of being separated from Him in His passion? Appealing to my faith in Him I tell myself that my religious life is my attempt to be with Him in His passion, and the evil one is sure to strive to separate us. The devil cannot take away the effect of the passion of our Lord, but he can induce me to separate myself from Him. I do separate myself from Thee, Lord, when I set myself up as a critic or as a judge of those who take Thy place. I beg Thy pardon for my past infidelity, and I beseech Thee that I may never more separate myself from Thee. It is because I do not see Thee in those whom Thou hast placed over me that I allow myself to usurp authority, and to judge, perhaps even Thy vicar, Thy bishops, Thy priests, and my own personal superiors. I find myself judging

subordinate superiors whilst flattering myself that I am loyal to the chief. Thou, Lord, didst not acknowledge usurped authority, but how careful Thou wast always in Thy obedience to constituted authority! Yet Thou wast subject to none. Thou wast thinking of me and giving me an example. I thank Thee for the lesson Thou hast given me in the court of Annas. I thank Thee for Thy meekness, Thy straightforwardness, Thy boldness, knowing the temper of the servants of Annas. There are few characters in Jewish history who have left a name more execrated than the name of Annas was, yet Thou wouldst be taken before him and speak against his usurpation. Thou wouldst use him to show me the danger of such conduct as his. Give me Thy own boldness, that I may be ever on Thy side in my religious life, and have no part with those who claim to be critics of the authority which represents Thee. Amen.

XI—The Trial before Caiphas

"And Annas sent Him bound to Caiphas the high-priest."—*John* xviii, 24.

"And the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put Him to death."—*Matth.* xxvi, 59-66.

THE trial before Caiphas is much more regular than that before Annas. There is at least a show of justice. There are witnesses, and although the witnesses are false, they find nothing against our Lord. Then are found two witnesses who had heard our Lord say,

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They did not quote Him correctly, but there was a certain amount of truth, and our Lord does not deny it, for He had power, if He wished to exercise it, even to destroy and rebuild the temple; but we know that He had not spoken of the material temple in which the worship of His nation was carried on, but the temple of His body in which so many were to find all that they desired. The high-priest asked our Lord to answer. The answer could have been given, but our Lord would not reply. The time for explanation was passed. Then the high-priest, wishing to convince our Lord of blasphemy, asked Him if He were the Son of God. This He would not deny, and would not be silent when the question was asked, for it would have been disloyal to His Father. Therefore, He quite boldly answered: "Thou hast said it," that is, "It is as thou hast said; and though thou hast now been allowed the power to judge Me, there will come a time when thou shalt see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, i.e., to judge the world and thee." What a majesty is in our Lord! He does not appeal to some other court, but He promises that He shall be judge and they the judged shall stand before Him. Our Lord does not answer the false witnesses, but He answers when His devotion to His Father is called in question.

How differently I behave! I am ready to answer an accusation when the answer will relieve my brethren of a false opinion concerning myself, but when the accusation affects only God's honour I am

often silent. Alas! how little have I learnt the lesson of my Lord and Master! He does not deign to answer mere lies against Himself, but if goodness or honour are given to Him He gives all to the Father. If His Father's honour is touched He hesitates not, though His answer may expose Him to the judgment of impiety. He knew the effect of His answer. He knew that it would give the high-priest the truth he was seeking, not indeed as truth, but as a means of condemnation.

The court of the high-priest had jurisdiction over all that concerned the law. The apparent blasphemy of proclaiming Himself the Son of God brought our Lord under the power of the ecclesiastical court. The high-priest, seeing that there was no hope of finding cause of condemnation from the testimony of witnesses, determined to condemn our Lord on His own word. "What further need have we of witnesses?" He avoids the duty of convicting our Lord on evidence, and shows himself anxious only to kill Him. No other sentence would have answered his purpose. At all costs this new teacher was to be silenced. To drive Him from the synagogue would have been of no use, for this had been done before, and had only led greater multitudes to follow Him. No other punishment would have answered their purpose, for He had escaped when they had tried to stone Him. There was nothing but death. The priests knew that if they consented amongst themselves they could convince Pilate of the policy of removing this disturber of the peace. The admission which our Lord had

made was the most sure means of bringing unanimity into the great council, and Caiphas at once seized upon it. He had already said that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. His object was attained; that unanimity was secured; the sentence: "He is worthy of death," was agreed to.

So it is in my judgment of those who take the place of our Lord in my community. I find that there is abundant evidence against them. Their efforts to reform are against the constituted state into which I have fallen, or their conduct seems to me a danger to the general good. I judge them and condemn them often on evidence which will not bear sifting. I take words of theirs and twist them to a meaning which suits my contention. I strive to get a following, and all the time I am exposing myself to the sin of Caiphas. It is expedient; I will foster discontent, and those that follow me are led to feel bitter, and lose their allegiance. If Caiphas had given the weight of his position to the side of fairness, the chief priests would have been saved the folly of crying out to Pilate: "His blood be upon us and upon our children."

Lord Jesus, grant that I be not led away to crucify Thee again, because I will not try to understand Thee; because I will not submit myself to Thy guidance, and will not serve Thee faithfully. Amen.

XII—Peter's Denial

"But Peter sat without in the court: and there came to him a servant-maid, saying: 'Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied before them all."—*Matt.* xxvi, 69-74.

Also *Mark* xiv, 66-71; *Luke* xxii, 55-60; and *John* xviii, 25-27.

THE denial of Peter is for each of us a source of self-examination and a warning. Peter is introduced to the court by St. John, who was known, and therefore his companion was not questioned by the maid who kept the door; but when he had entered and joined the men who were warming themselves at the fire, by the light of the fire the maid saw him clearly, and looking earnestly upon him, said to some of the men: "This man also was with Him"; and as they turned upon Peter the maid said, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth; thou art one of this man's disciples." Peter answered, "I am not. Woman, I know Him not; I know not what thou sayest." This is the first denial. After his uncalled-for boldness in the Garden he had fled with the rest, but he had returned and sought out John, in the hope of seeing our Lord again. He was unnerved by the sudden questions of the maid. He had thought himself safe.

Peter's first denial is that he is not our Lord's disciple; he the special chosen Vicar of our Lord, not even a disciple! The first denial left him in fear, but he still waited, and as the conversation continued

to be concerning our Lord who was being examined in the hall above, another maid and one of the men in the group said to him, "Thou also art one of them," whilst the maid said first to those who stood by: "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth"; and to another, "This is one of them." She then questioned Peter himself: "Art thou also one of His disciples?" Peter answered the maid first, "I am not"; and the man who had directly accused him: "Man, I am not"; and then to those who stood by looking at him: "I do not know the Man." This is the second denial. Then after some time, in about the space of an hour, a man said to his companions: "Of a truth, this man also was with Him, for he is also a Galilean." And one more insistent, a kinsman of Malchus said, "Did I not see thee in the Garden with them?" And the rest took up the accusation: "Surely thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean: thy speech betrayeth thee." And he began to curse and swear, "I know not this Man of whom you speak"; and to the man who had detected his peculiar speech: "Man, I know not what thou sayest." To the kinsman of Malchus he denied again, and this is the third denial. In the first denial he simply asserts that he is not the disciple of Jesus, that he did not know Him, and that he was a stranger and did not understand what the maid was saying. In the second, he repeated his denial, in one case, with an oath. In the third he cursed and swore that he did not know our Lord; and again, that he did not understand what was said.

We see in St. Peter's fall the effect of trusting self. He had tried to go his own way time after time, and our Lord had always corrected him. Now He leaves him to discover his own weakness if left to himself. Peter's motive was good, but his trust was misplaced. He was relying on his own strength.

In the same way our Lord allows me to fall when I rely on myself, because the religious life can be based and founded only on complete distrust of self and complete reliance on God.

Not only does Peter deny that he is a disciple of our Lord, but he denies all acquaintance with Him, and this, though there had been no thought in his mind and no desire in his heart for the three years he had followed our Lord which was not directed to Him. There is no depth of weakness that is not laid open to the self-reliant soul.

Then Peter adds cursing and swearing to his denial, and calls God to witness that he had nothing to do with our Lord, that he does not even know Him, and that he does not know what the men and women who accuse him are saying. How completely he separates himself from his friend and Master! In St. Peter's case there was ever a regard for self which had made him stand in our Lord's way frequently before, and this regard of and trust in self had to be completely removed before he could be thoroughly trusted by our Lord. It was removed by this revelation of his own weakness, for when he returned to himself and had received the Holy Ghost he gave to the world the lesson he learnt in those words in his

epistle to the Catholic world: "Cast all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you."

Lord Jesus, root out of my heart any false trust in self that Thou seest in me, for if self-trust could bring Thy favoured disciple after three years' intercourse with Thee to such baseness as the denial of Thee implied, to what baseness and sin may not my trust in myself reduce me? Save me, I beseech Thee, from this sin; save me from all foolish trust in myself. Let me always fear myself, and put my trust only in Thee. Thou hast care of me, and Thou wilt keep me safe in Thy love. Amen.

XIII—Jesus is Taken to Pilate

"Then they led Jesus from Caiphas to the governor's hall. And it was morning: and they went not into the hall, that they might not be defiled, but that they might eat the pasch."—*John* xviii, 28.

HAVING determined to kill Jesus, the priests had no escape from sending Him to the Roman governor. It was morning, that is, between three and six o'clock. The court of the high-priest which had pronounced our Lord worthy of death could not actually condemn Him to death, or rather, could not carry out their sentence without the sanction of the governor. They sought the court as soon as it was possible, as soon as the sun was up, and Pilate was waiting. He had sanctioned the sending of a body of troops to help the priests. He was expecting the people with their prisoner, and he met them outside

the court, asking for their heads of accusation. They answered that if He were not a criminal they would have dealt with Him themselves. Pilate, anxious to avoid trouble, answered: "Why not take Him and judge Him?" Then the meaning of their bringing our Lord to Pilate was made evident: "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." This power had been probably taken from them by the Romans.

Then Pilate went to Jesus, who had been taken into the inner court, and questioned Him. It seems evident that the accusation of the Jews was the treason of proclaiming Himself king of the Jews, which was a false accusation. Pilate asked Him, not what He had called Himself, but what He was, and our Lord asked Pilate first what was the source of information, or if he took Him as a traitor, or if he was acting on information given him by others. Pilate repudiated the idea that he should be moved by the opinion of the Jews: "Am I a Jew? Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee up to me. What hast Thou done?" Our Lord, as usual, showed that by claiming His kingdom He was guilty of no treason: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now My kingdom is not from hence." This was quite outside Pilate's jurisdiction, but our Lord's manifest nobility forced the question: "Art Thou a king then?" He asked not, "Art Thou the king of the Jews?" but, "Thou dost then claim to be a king?" And Jesus answered:

"Thou sayest that I am a king." Our Lord's words really signify, "Indeed I am." He acknowledges the fact and explains: "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice." Truly our Lord's kingdom is not of this world. He claims a kingdom that can unite all the kingdoms of the earth. Everyone that is of the truth is a member of that kingdom, and heareth the voice of the King.

This, then, is no crime over which Pilate has jurisdiction, therefore in a half-puzzled, and half-impressed frame of mind he asks: "What is truth?" But he did not wait for an answer, and went out again to the Jews to deliver his judgment: "I find no cause in Him." A chance now offered itself of releasing Jesus, and Pilate offered to release to the Jews some one prisoner according to their choice. He then offered them Barabbas or Jesus. Whilst they were debating their choice Pilate returned to the inner court and there found a messenger from his wife, who urged him to take no part against Jesus, this just Man, because she had suffered much in a dream because of Him. This did not weigh with Pilate. He heard the Jews had made their choice, and returned to them in the outer court where he was greeted with the cry: "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Thus they rejected our Lord, not only as their King, their teacher, their Christ, but also His person; that is, they rejected Him in His office and in His person. Thus, Jesus is the corner-stone which the builders rejected.

Then Pilate washed his hands before them, and having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to the Jews to crucify Him.

And so it is in my life. I reject our Lord's right over me; I reject Him as my teacher, my guide and my friend, and I am in danger of excusing myself before I sin against Him. Pilate wished to be fair, but he condemned the innocent. He had warnings from conscience, from reason, and from his wife, but the difficulty of enquiry, the certainty of discontent on the part of the Jews, the selfish hope that a little indolent acquiescence will give him peace, are all too strong for him, and his natural indolence brings him to use the power given to him to restrain the known ferocity of the Jews to give that ferocity full play.

I never know to what depths my moral indolence can lead me. I could often save an innocent character if I would insist on enquiry before passing judgment. I will not take the trouble to oppose an angry, unreasonable member of the community. I will not stand up for the truth, I will not even stay to inquire into the truth. I weakly condemn, and then too late I repent of the harm my weakness has caused. A little boldness on the part of authority would often free a community from a long course of uncharity and oppression. Grant, Lord, that my weakness may not be the cause of Thy crucifixion. Amen.

XIV—Jesus Before Herod

"And when he understood that He was of Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him away to Herod, who was also himself at Jerusalem in those days."—*Luke* xxiii, 7.

IN the early part of our Lord's trial before Pilate there is mention of our Lord's country, and He is called a Galilean. Pilate, ready to snatch at any circumstance which will relieve him from the trouble facing him, at once asks if the prisoner is a Galilean; and when he understands that He is, he sends Him bound to Herod. Herod was left by the Roman conquerors as a subordinate ruler. For a long time he had desired to meet Jesus, but our Lord had avoided him. Now to show to what depth lewdness can debase a man, our Lord allowed Himself to be taken before Herod.

Herod, as far as we can judge, was anxious to shine as a prince who royally entertained the chief men of his nation. He had heard of our Lord's miracles, and he desired that He should provide a show for him and his courtiers by working some miracle. The story is told of his bringing a dead body into the court and asking our Lord to restore the man to life. Our Lord will have nothing to do with him, and so, as a last resort, having questioned Him and got no answer, he dresses Him in the garment of a fool and sends Him back to Pilate. The one result of our Lord's being sent to Herod is that Pilate and Herod are reconciled, and there is no

longer an estrangement between them. Jesus allows Himself to be treated as a fool, that two of His enemies might be reconciled. He could have accentuated the enmity, He could have used it for His own cause, but His example to me is rather to bear abuse. He was willing to go through treatment which was atrocious, if by so doing He could lessen the misunderstanding between the two rulers. For Himself He gets nothing but ill-treatment and two long journeys through the now crowded streets, the object of vile abuse, and the laughing-stock of the Jews. It was not necessary for His work that He should subject Himself to this treatment, but He would have me bear ill-treatment if I can by it do good in any way to others. In such circumstances I would have thought only of myself, but our Lord thinks of the good He can do to His enemies. He shows me the selfishness of my touchiness when I will not allow even innocent fun to be made of me. My own amusement sometimes leads me to make fun of others, but I myself must always be treated seriously, though I may know that a little innocent amusement may be much needed, and perhaps at my expense, for the sake of someone who is down-hearted or inclined to be self-centred, and I will not consent to allow myself to be the butt. Serious misunderstandings might often be put aside if I would allow a little fun to be made of me when the misunderstanding is between my friends. Our Lord allowed Himself to be the plaything of His enemies in order to draw them together.

The two journeys through the streets added much to our Lord's sufferings, and took from Him much of the strength He needed to enable Him to go through the rest of His passion. He might have prevented both by giving Pilate the opportunity of condemning Him, but the lesson of facing weariness was of much importance for me, and my Lord would leave me no doubt of His example.

When our Lord returned to Pilate the governor found that his hope that Herod would find some way of releasing our Lord had failed, and he strove again to save himself from the injustice of condemning Him. Probably the report of Herod's treatment influenced him to give the Jews a spectacle, so he brought our Lord before them and offered Him in mockery as the King of the Jews. Perhaps he thought that the sight of Jesus bound and wearing the dress of a fool would convince them that there was no danger to be feared from such a king. But they, seeing that neither Pilate nor Herod was strong enough to resist them, clamoured for His death. Pilate had gained nothing by the delay; he had but given time for the chief priests to stir up the people, and now they are insistent on His death, and that death, crucifixion. Thus has Pilate's dilatory conduct increased our Lord's difficulties. The putting his duty upon the shoulders of others has failed, as it always fails, he is faced with a fiercer crowd, and he cannot now hope to save Jesus.

Lord Jesus, thou didst suffer all this useless fatigue to show me how foolishly I act when I will not face

the duty which lies before me. Thou showest me that I gain nothing by dilatoriness and lazily shirking my duty. I make it the more difficult to do Thy will. I pray Thee, Lord, that Thou wilt save me from treating Thee as Pilate and Herod did. Amen.

XV—The Scourging

"Then therefore Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him."—*John*, xix, 1.

PILATE had offered our Lord to the Jews along with Barabbas, and they had chosen Barabbas. Pilate had found no cause for punishment in our Lord, but still to satisfy the Jews somewhat he said: "I will scourge Him and let Him go." Therefore, the scourging of our Lord was a needless cruelty. It was the unthinking cruelty which an indolent man inflicted on another, because he would not exert himself. He had the most ample authority, and the means to uphold it, but he feared at the same time that he despised the Jews. It would mean trouble to himself if he were to exercise his authority. He did not think of the cruelty inflicted on our Lord.

Jesus submitted Himself to this cruelty that I might join myself to Him when it seems to me that I am unconsidered by those in authority. This kind of treatment is common and such that I may expect to affect me. Our Lord allows Himself to be needlessly scourged for my sake, and principally to strengthen me not to complain. He was scourged according to the Roman manner. The Jews allowed any number

of strokes less than forty, but our Lord received many more than that number. He allowed this excessive punishment because of the excess of my sins against Him. As I do not hesitate when faced with excess in my sin, so my Lord did not hesitate to submit Himself to this excessive cruelty. He might have claimed to be punished as a Jew, but He saw me shirking when called upon to endure a small inconvenience for Him, and He would take the greater punishment uncomplainingly. He was thinking of me and giving me an example which I have failed to follow

We have no details of the scourging given to us in the Gospel, but it is probable that our Lord was bound to a pillar. It is probable also that the most cruel of the soldiers would take part in the scourging, and vie with one another in the force they could give to their blows. The Roman soldier had not much feeling for a subdued race, and the Jew was peculiarly open to retaliation ; the sins and the character of His nation would lead the soldiers to be more severe at such a time. In so many ways our Lord shows us His spirit of sacrifice. He will resist when His enemies throw discredit on His Father, but He will accept without complaining whatever is done against Himself. He will claim no right which could alleviate His sufferings. He will be scourged as a Roman, and crucified as a Jew. He will not shirk anything, however painful, that He may help me to be a little more self-sacrificing, a little more resolute not to claim my full right, not to make my own feelings the centre of all my dealings with others.

Thou sparest not Thyself, Lord; Thou wilt bear the pain inflicted by an unthinking governor, though it was not in any sense necessary for Thy work. It was only another sign of Thy love which Thou hadst already proved beyond doubt. Thy scourging might rouse a soul that had not known Thy love, or had not fully appreciated it. Thou wilt not allow the most callous to doubt Thee. How can I acknowledge Thy love better than by following Thy example? By upholding my supposed rights I have often been led to pose as the only one to be considered, and my indolence has refused to allow me to exert myself to save another from pain. Thou art thinking of me and of anyone with whom I have to deal. For Thy sake, dear Lord, I will try to be more considerate, and at the same time I will try to see how I can spare another, rather than how I can spare myself. I see now how my indolence is the cause of pain to others. Help me, Lord, that I may avoid such unthinking cruelty in the future.

Thou wast without sin, dear Lord, and it was not to expiate sin that Thou didst allow Thyself to be scourged. It was to teach me that I am nearer to Thee when I suffer from the thoughtlessness of others, than when my thoughtlessness inflicts pain which a little care might obviate. Pilate did not appreciate how cruel his conduct was. He saw no cause for punishment in Thee, yet he allowed Thee to be the sport of his soldiers. They could enjoy the sight of Thy pain as the Jews who were without the court could also enjoy the thought of Thy suffering, and

Thou didst endure and didst brace Thyself to suffer the inhuman scourging to enable me not to cry out, and not to complain, but just to bear when uncalled-for suffering is my lot.

Lord Jesus, I thank Thee for Thy endurance. I thank Thee for Thy love; I thank Thee for Thy example. Grant me the grace to endure for Thee, to love Thee, and to follow Thee. Amen.

XVI—The Crowning with Thorns

"And platting a crown of thorns they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand. And bowing the knee before Him they mocked Him, saying: 'Hail, king of the Jews.'"—*Matt.* xxvii, 29.

HOW thoughtlessly Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers! What they would do with Him mattered not to Pilate. The horror of the crown of thorns, the brutality of the striking the thorns into the head, the mockery and the foulness of the spitting upon Him would all have been abhorrent to the cultivated mind of Pilate, but for the present he was free from the trouble of his prisoner, and he would leave Him to the mercy of his soldiers. He is a sample of the unfeeling inhumanity of the selfish, self-centred, indolent man.

The taking off the garment they had thrown over Him after the scourging, and putting on Him a piece of purple to mock His royalty was a further outrage. Then they began their long mockery. Some of them had been present at our Lord's trial, they had related

the incidents, and among others that He had been put forward as the King of the Jews. Therefore, they would make a mock king of Him. There must be a crown, and they found one in a few sprigs of thorn; bending the wood so that the thorns would keep the crown in place, they first of all crown Him. Then it occurs to them that He must have a sceptre, and it is found in a heavy reed. Then His garment must be royal, and they find an old piece of purple cloth, and with their swords they make a hole in it to pass it over His head, but first the garment He has on must be removed. They then find Him a throne. Now that He is crowned and has His royal sceptre, and is clothed royally, they proceed to give Him homage. The homage given to a king includes three acts—the kneeling before him in hailing him king, the kiss of peace, and the kissing his sceptre. No act must be omitted, but each becomes a mockery. The kneeling is consented to as part of the farce; the royal title is, in their minds, a manifest mockery; the kiss of peace is changed into a blow with the hands, and the kissing of the sceptre is changed into the striking of the crown with the reed He holds. The mockery is complete. Jesus bears it all meekly, and begins that prayer for them which was vocal on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He is silent, and prays for His tormentors. He allows Himself to be the plaything of these rude men. Whilst they are intent on their sport an idea strikes one that they can improve on the travesty of the kiss of peace, they can spit upon Him, and each

one goes through the mockery again, and carries through the new suggestion.

O Jesus, if it were not that I can see Thy love through it all, the whole scene is disgusting, but Thy love of me is plain in all Thou sufferest. I take part in the mockery when I tell Thee I will acknowledge Thee as my King, and then forget my loyalty. When I allow thoughts that offend Thy infinite purity to remain fixed in my mind I press the thorns on Thy brow. When I kneel before Thee pretending to pray, though I wilfully allow other thoughts to fill my mind, I bow the knee before Thee in mockery. When I am cruel to the least of Thy friends I strike Thee on the face. When I repeat disgraceful stories about Thy ministers and friends I spit upon Thee. When I am spiteful in my dealings with anyone I strike Thee upon the face. Yet I know, dear Lord, that Thou didst bear all these insults for me. Thou wishest me to be with Thee and to bear insults and annoyances in Thy company. Thou art taking my part as surely as Thou art taking the part of those whom I do not consider. When I am the victim of the cruelty of others Thou art taking my part, and when I am cruel to others Thou art the one to whom I am cruel. Restrain me, I beseech Thee, Lord, from repeating any part of the mockery which was given to Thee. If I could see Thee in the person of all those who annoy me I should perhaps be able to keep myself from the cruelty I have been guilty of. When I am exposed, however slightly, to the mockery Thou didst suffer, grant that I may have the courage to join

myself to Thee, and bear whatsoever is put upon me with the meekness Thou didst exercise. Thou triest everyone Thou lovest by means of the same indignities which Thou didst bear. No insult, no cruelty which I have to bear can compare with the cruelty that was shown to Thee, and which Thou didst bear so willingly. Thou hast given me an example of silence and prayer which will be of great use to me. Abuse cannot separate me from Thee. Insult does not make Thee abandon me, but it brings me yet closer to Thee if I will bear it with Thee. I shall never have to bear a tithe of the insults cast at Thee. Draw me near to Thee, Lord, by the suffering I have to face. I have deserved it all, for I have heedlessly inflicted much upon others who are Thy friends. Be gracious, Lord, and allow me to see the example Thou wishest me to follow. Let me not pass by and forget Thee, but let me draw nearer to Thee the more Thy sufferings become mine. Amen.

XVII—The Ecce Homo

"Behold the Man."—*John* xix, 5.

WHEN Pilate saw our Lord after His scourging and ill-usage by the soldiers he determined to try once more to move the Jews to withdraw their demand for His death. The fear of Him that had consumed His enemies could find no place now, neither could there be room for envy of Him as a teacher when they saw Him thus ill-used, degraded,

defiled, a mock king. Pilate must have said to himself: "Surely there can be no feeling but pity aroused by the sight of such an object!" Jesus, who knew the reason of His being shown thus to the Jews, did not make any resistance; He came forth at the bidding of Pilate to be again rejected. Not even in His disgrace would they have any mercy. They could not trust the multitude if our Lord were released. They did not trust Pilate, and having by their persistence secured the scourging they would now clamour for His death. They had shown Pilate their intention to compass the death of our Lord, and now they appeal to the law. They have a law according to which anyone who maketh himself God is to suffer death. They do not now hesitate to demand, not only death, but the death of a slave. There is no insult that shall be spared. When, therefore, Pilate asked what he should do with their king, they cried out: "Crucify Him!" The summit of hatred has been reached, there is no further insult possible. Pilate asked for pity, and they give free vent to hatred. Pilate now no longer appeals to their pity, but presents our Lord simply as a man. Is it possible that they will vent rage on their fellow-man? Can they not forget their fears, their envy, even the law? He is a man and a blameless man. But to them He is a slave, and there is no feeling for Him. He is not to have any consideration. The people now want an execution, and the more that execution can satisfy their cruel thirst, the more they desire it: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

Lord Jesus, am I too in the crowd, crying for Thy execution? Give me at least the grace that I be not guilty of this. Let my heart be touched as Pilate wished the hearts of the Jews to be touched. There is yet time to draw back from the full crime. I will not take Thy life. I know, Lord, that at times I have been as perverse as the Jews. Thou hast shown me that I was unjust to Thee, that I was not giving Thee the obedience and love which were Thy right, and Thou didst show me that if I were not loyal to Thee I should be led to pursue my evil way and wilfully sin against Thee. Thus would I continue in a course of sin and join myself to the Jews, crying out with them: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" My own will, my own pleasure are of more importance to me than the will and pleasure of my Lord; and if my own pleasure means the death of my Lord, then I clamour for that death.

How gradually the cry grew in force, so that I scarcely believed it was I who called out! What a possession the desired pleasure gained over me, blinding me to what I was doing! I was indeed blind, Lord; I was deaf. I did not see Thee clearly; I did not hear myself crying out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" But now that the pleasure is passed, and found to be empty and worthless, I find myself in the crowd. I abominate the company in which I find myself, and I wish to free myself. I wish to forget that I have cried out for Thy death. Alas! how could I do it? How could I be so blind to Thee standing there despised, whilst Thou wast the Man,

the Man to whom all that is worth in me is attracted? I will fix my eyes on Thee, Lord. I will not close them to the love Thou showest me. I cannot look upon Thee and call for Thy death. Lord Jesus, look up at me as Thou standest there crowned, defiled with spittle, carrying the sceptre which I have put into Thy hand in mockery. I have not acknowledged Thee. Let me now at least show Thee my allegiance. I cannot cry out against Thee if Thou wilt look upon me and show me that Thou art still ready to love me. Alas! how often I have rejected Thy love! I desire no longer to reject Thee. Instead of crying out for Thy death I cry to Thee to give me new life, that I may make reparation for the past. Why wouldst Thou have no one to comfort Thee in this hour? Thy Mother was not with Thee. She was sinless and had no part in Thy scourging and the mockery; in these only sinners can have part. She grieved for Thee and for those who were so cruel to Thee. Her heart is open to me if I will make reparation with her for the many insults I have offered to Thee.

Lord Jesus, in Thy mercy receive my repentance, and through my repentance give me the grace of sharing in Thy sufferings. Thou didst bear them all for me. If there had been no other sinner but me Thou wouldst love me in the same insults Thou didst so silently receive. Let not Thy patience be of no avail in my life. Amen.

XVIII—The First Station

"And so Pilate being willing to satisfy the people, released to them Barabbas, and delivered up Jesus, when He had scourged Him, to be crucified."—*Mark* xv, 15.

PILATE, now touched with fear when he heard the Jews claim the death of our Lord because He made Himself the Son of God, strove again to release Him. But the Jews knew Pilate; they knew there was a king whom he feared more than the Son of God. They therefore still cried: "If thou release this man thou art not Caesar's friend. For whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." This made Pilate's duty plain to him. Whatever else he could risk he could not risk the enmity of Rome. Therefore, he brought Jesus forth from the inner court and took himself for the first time the seat of judgment. Still he would make a further attempt, and half in scorn and half in pity, he presented Jesus again to the chief priests with the words: "Behold your king!" They, seeing the fear of Pilate, again cry out: "Away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate could not resist the jibe: "Shall I crucify your king?" Now the priests took the last step. They had rejected our Lord, but they had not yet rejected the belief of their nation that God would send them a king, a Messias, a deliverer. This hope of Israel they now relinquished, and they chose Caesar for their king: "We have no king but Caesar." Whether Pilate understood the full meaning of their

cry or not we cannot tell, but he saw that further argument was useless, and finding no cause in our Lord, he washed his hands before them all, saying: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man. Look you to it." And the whole crowd, now thoroughly roused by the chief priests, accepted the consequences of their deed and cried: "His blood be upon us and upon our children!" Then Pilate delivered Him to them to be crucified.

We see here the danger of false fear and the growth of a sinful habit till it dominates the whole life. Pilate fears the Jews and the reports they will send to Rome if he does not do their will. He fears Caesar, the man who knew no pity when another stood in his way. The Roman policy was to conciliate the Jews. They had left Herod in power, a king of their own race. They had not interfered with the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the chief priests. They had favoured Annas by allowing him to have the honour of the high-priesthood. Pilate himself had given the power of arms to help the priests to secure our Lord. Pilate knew that if he crossed the wishes of the chief priests they would find means to have him replaced at Jerusalem. He knew that there were many who would be ready to take the place he filled, but most of all, he knew that his own future success depended upon his avoiding a rising of the priests and people. It was better to let them have their way than to risk a disturbance. Thus, our Lord was made to suffer rather than that a disagreeable task enjoined by justice should be undertaken. Our

Lord puts Himself in the place of so many who are treated with injustice, because to be just will entail opposition. Our Lord does not complain, though there could not be a greater injustice than was being worked upon Him, that He might give an example to all who seem to themselves to be in a like position. What an example is here of our Lord's silence! He willingly accepts the consequences of the weakness of Pilate. He offers Himself to the fury of the Jews. He is silent; we hear no word of complaint, no word of reproach, no assertion of His rights.

Alas! how differently I behave when an unwitting injustice is done to me! For the most part the injustice is not meant by those who seem to me so spiteful. Our Lord desires that those whom He loves should experience in part the same that He was exposed to. It is in the bearing for His sake the like treatment which He bore for me that I am able to draw more nearly to Him. As He thought so little of Himself and was willing to be treated unjustly for my sake, He wishes me to strive to bear all for Him.

Teach me, Lord, not to lose the benefit of Thy example, the closer union with Thyself. Thy desire in all that Thou didst endure was that the thought of Thee might encourage me to learn from Thee how Thou wishest me to act. The rage of the Jews was directed against Thee personally, and Thou wast silent. The more personal the injustice done to me, the more insistent am I in complaint. Thou showest me the true use of injustice. It never succeeds in reality, except in the bringing souls nearer to Thee,

and this is done principally by silence. Give me the courage, dear Lord, to be silent. Give me the courage not to exaggerate the evil done to me, but to look to Thee that I may learn how to use it, however unjust it may be. Thy gifts are always sent for use, and I have not recognised injustice as Thy gift; I have not used it as Thou wishest. Pardon me, Lord, and give me Thy own spirit, that in the future I may accept and use after Thy example whatsoever is sent to me by Thy loving hand. Amen.

XIX—Our Lord accepts the Cross

"And bearing His own cross He went forth."—*John* xix, 17.

WHEN our Lord was delivered to the Jews to be crucified a rough cross was put together for Him, and taking the cross on His shoulders He went forth. He accepted the cross and made it His own. The cross which was offered Him might even now be refused. He was innocent and had been pronounced innocent by the judge who could have condemned Him to death, yet He willingly accepted the cross, and made it His own. More than this, He would carry it Himself. Usually the criminal was spared this last indignity, and the executioners or the servants carried the cross for him, but our Lord would make it His own, and bear the full burden Himself. There is a reason for this action which was designed to give me hope. In future ages there would be those who, realising the heinousness of their

sins, would find it difficult to believe that their sins would be forgiven, and for them our Lord would, for a time at least, carry the whole burden Himself. The cross represented the sins of men, and He would, as long as His bodily strength remained, make them His own, and as His own He would bear the whole weight of the cross. He thus gives me hope, however grievous my sins, however delayed my repentance. He teaches me also a lesson I need to learn in many circumstances of life. He teaches me not to shirk the consequences of my determined resolutions. I can be bold and courageous in making resolutions, and very fainthearted in meeting difficulties to the completion of my resolves. Our Lord, having wilfully accepted the cross, would do more than was necessary, that I might be encouraged to do that without which my resolution would fail. So much of my failure comes, not from want of suitable resolution, but from a faintheartedness and cowardice in bearing the small inconveniences necessary for the carrying out of my resolution. I resolve to have a guard over my temper, but the first assault is too much for me, because I will not accept the first difficulty, the first impulse to rebel. If I had the courage to keep myself in check before the main assault I should have strength when strength is required, and so of my other resolutions.

Or again, I dissipate my energy over the unimportant assault and am unguarded when the main assault is upon me. But mostly my resolutions are not effective, because I rely on myself in the execution of them. This is my main weakness, and the enemy

allows me to be vain of one victory that I may begin to rely on myself and thus be more easily overcome. Our Lord would bring to my mind that He will be near me, and that He is able to bear the whole burden, and that if I do not trust to myself I may rely on His strength and His love. It is my own strength I cannot trust, my self-love which deceives me, my own vanity which I must fear.

In the acceptance of the cross as in the carrying of it so willingly my Lord is thinking of me. If there should be a cross put upon me, even as little deserved by me as was His, I am encouraged to embrace it and to carry it. I am never nearer to our Lord than when I take as my own, and at the same time as His, the cross laid upon me. My first impulse is to refuse. Our Lord does not ask me to seek the cross, unless He gives me the attraction, but I am not to shirk it when it is offered me.

In Thy mercy, allow me to join Thee, Lord, in the receiving any cross Thou askest me to bear. It is ever Thou who encouragest me. I am following Thy example, and the example Thou didst especially mean for me when I take up the cross. But I cannot carry the least cross by my own strength; I must take it up with Thee, and I must carry it after Thee, having Thee ever in my mind. Teach me the mystery of the cross. Why wast Thou so willing to accept it? Why wast Thou so strong to carry it Thyself? Thou didst know the shrinking of human nature from suffering. Thou didst know also the capacity of exaggeration of difficulties when the heart

holds back, and Thou didst wish to show me Thy way of overcoming the fears that assail me. I must take my cross from Thee and make it my own, carrying it with Thee. It is Thou who carriest my cross. It is my having part with Thee that will enable me to bear it. Thou indeed didst carry Thy cross Thyself, and Thou wishest all who are Thine to join Thee. I see, Lord, how my fears have taken hold of me, because I have thought only of myself and forgotten Thee. I have forgotten that Thou hast made my cross Thy own, and that Thou art willing to bear it for me. Oh, help me to bear it with Thee, Lord. I know that I shall fail to bear my cross, however light, unless Thou art with me. Indeed, the cross borne without Thy aid is not a cross Thou wishest me to carry. Give me the grace to embrace and not to refuse the cross Thou hast prepared for me. In memory of Thy love encourage me to bear all things for Thee and with Thee. Amen.

XX—The Second Station

"And they led Him out to crucify Him."—*Mark* xv, 20.

OUR Lord has made the carrying of the cross the test of discipleship. This is the act in which He calls upon all to follow Him: "Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." (*Luke* xiv, 27.) And again: "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me is not worthy of Me." (*Matth.* x, 38.)

Each act of our Lord's life is capable of being a full example to His followers. Each act is done with the complete divine power, and therefore with the complete divine love. Each can be, if fully appreciated, the source of all virtue to the soul; but our Lord has chosen out certain acts for certain definite purposes. The glance of His divine eyes is to teach us the value of kindness and directness of look. The feeding of the multitude is to teach the tender care each must have if he would have part with our Lord in the relief of distress. The sitting down at table with Lazarus is to teach the use of kindness on the part of those who are hospitable. But for general discipleship He has chosen the carrying of the cross. To be His disciple and to be worthy of Him I must carry my cross. This is not so much the accepting of the cross as the continued carrying of it. Many are willing to be His disciples when He first offers His cross who fail to remain His, because they will not persevere in bearing the burden. Perseverance then, is of more consequence than acceptance of difficulty. It is more easy to accept a great sacrifice than to continue to give a small one faithfully. Our Lord asks this perseverance of all who are worthy of Him, of all whom He has chosen to follow Him. More than this, as we learn from the lives of the saints, He is not satisfied with the bearing of one cross, but as the shoulders become accustomed to one which is borne cheerfully for His sake, He seems invariably to expect that cross be added to cross till the full burden of discipleship is felt. Thus the test of my being worthy

of Him is not so much that I carry a cross, but that I am ready to carry any cross He may choose for me, because the cross which is the test of true discipleship is not the cross of my own choice. As the soul becomes strong to follow our Lord the cross becomes more and more the cross of His choice. The soul seems not to be considered. Sometimes it is the fact that a soul would choose the cross of physical suffering, and our Lord gives the cross of weak health, which is much more trying to an earnest spirit. Sometimes it is the cross of inaction, sometimes of constant and almost overwhelming work—the first to an active spirit, the latter to one who loves a quiet life. The cross is not chosen according to each one's attraction, but solely that the discipleship may be perfect.

When I recognise God's hand I am more ready to take up my cross and follow Him. Not unfrequently the being able to recognise God's will in the choice of a cross requires that the principles which have underlain the spiritual life should be purified. I find for the most part that self-love has had too great a part in my life, and the proper use of the cross is God's means of opening my eyes to this false position. Or a false affection has taken hold of me, and I find myself ready for any sacrifice except the giving up of that, and God sends me the cross of disillusionment, and for a time all the worth of life seems to leave me. Whatever the cross He sends, I cannot be His disciple, unless I am ready, not only to accept, but to carry it manfully.

How manfully Thou didst carry Thy cross, dear Lord! How careful Thou wast to give me the example!

Thy disciples must not only listen to Thy words, but must follow Thee in all things. Many souls know Thy words, but how few willingly carry the cross Thou offerest them! St. John speaks of Thy going forth out of Jerusalem, which Thou didst love, carrying Thy cross, and Thou askest the souls chosen by Thee to go forth from all they love. To go forth in this manner is at times a great cross to Thy servants. For the most part Thou leavest to those who follow Thee the affection of relations and friends, but of some Thou desirest a going forth which is all bitterness. At times when Thou callest a soul to a closer following of Thee Thou demandest a going forth from those who have held him in honour. Thou givest the example in the carrying of Thy own cross. How short a time it was since Thou didst allow the people to bring Thee in triumph into the city, greeting Thee as the king of Israel! And now there is nothing too vile to be shouted after Thee! Seldom indeed dost Thou send forth Thy friends to such a trial, but if I am to take up my cross and follow Thee I must be ready to accept Thy will when my service of Thee entails such a sacrifice. Thou art on Thy way to death which is to be the life of the world. Grant that if any leaving of friends is necessary to enable me to live perfectly the life Thou hast purchased for me I may have the courage to follow Thee. Thou art the Friend whom I must never leave, the Friend I must follow to the end of my life. Amen.

XXI—The Third Station

Our Lord Falls under the Weight of the Cross

THERE is no actual mention of the falls of our Lord under the cross, except the implication of the words used by St. Mark. He tells us that the soldiers forced Simon to take up the cross, as if it were on the ground. There is a tradition that finds its echo in the devotion of the Stations of the Cross that our Lord fell three times on the way to Calvary. The first time was just before His Mother met Him on the rough road. After this fall the soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross behind our Lord. There is a peculiar grace in the falls of our Lord as He carries the cross. He supported His body already weakened by the scourging and the abuse of the soldiers by His divine power, but three times He withdrew that support, and at once He fell under the cross. In like manner He is willing to support those who come after Him as long as they trust in His power, but as soon as they begin to stand by themselves He allows them to fall. Their fall is in pride; His is in reparation. In this first fall at the beginning of His journey we may see that even He will not attempt to bear the cross His Father has given Him apart from the support of His Father.

The devil strives to persuade the soul by an attraction for suffering, as not a few who enter religion think they have, to keep up practices which

they were able to bear in times of fervour, and he argues that what has been borne before can be borne again, not now in the strength that comes from God, but in the strength of self-discipline. Thus, many who suffer, because they are able to bear suffering, rather than because God puts suffering upon them, fall, not as our Lord did in His weakness, but as the devil did in self strength and pride. For these our Lord fell under the weight of the cross, and fell in the sight of His Mother, the Queen of Sorrows, the Queen of humble suffering.

This humility which our Lord teaches me in this first fall is of great importance to me in my religious life. The world is ever urging me to self-reliance, but the only reliance that can be urged in the spiritual life is reliance on God. When the soul is so united to God that there is no desire and no love in the soul except the desire and the love of God it may be trusted to rely on self. My companions in religion may urge me so to bind myself to my community that I should think only of its prosperity. Here again there may be a reliance on a human company without reference to God, and in such reliance a community may be led astray, just as an individual is. God is the soul of a community; there is no following our Lord in this His first fall, but sooner or later there is a fall from which the community does not rise. From such a fall save Thy servants, O my God! If Thou allowest me to fall under the weight of the cross let that fall be in utter trust in Thee, and in Thy mercy allow me to rise again and

struggle forward. Let no fall leave me weaker in my trust in Thee, but let me bear my cross to the end as Thou didst.

The fall of our Lord under the cross brought Him new courage, as the mistakes I make through following inadvertently my own will and my own way may bring new courage to me. Indeed, the only way in which I can use a mistake is to acknowledge it and its cause in myself, and putting my trust in God, and humbling myself before Him again take up the cross. In none of His falls does our Lord sink hopelessly, and in none need I sink without hope. Some of the crosses our Lord gives me try my physical powers, some my powers of character, and some my power of mind. In all these there is one way of using the weakness, that is, to cast myself upon the hidden strength of God. The weakness of body, weariness in work, sickness or physical incapacity have not been a hindrance to God's work in the lives of the saints, and will not be in mine, if I, falling with our Lord, will rise in renewed trust in Him. So, too, weakness of character can be used by God, for He can support the weakness. It is easy to criticise the weakness of the saints who, though they failed in the eyes of the world, yet secured the completion of God's work committed to them. In like manner, weakness of mind can be used by God. A fall is God's warning not to trust myself.

Thou knowest all my weakness, dear Lord; do Thou in Thy great kindness allow me to make use of it as Thou wishest. Thou hast made me weak, that

Thou mayest have pity on me. Thou wouldst have me trust only in Thee. Thou art ever ready to help the work of Thy hands. My weakness is not an excuse for me if I fail to do Thy work; it is only an opportunity for Thy greater assistance. Do not fail me, dear Lord, my Creator. With Thee and in Thy strength even my weakness will be no hindrance to Thy work. In Thy mercy let me not succeed if success will separate me from Thee, without whom success is indeed a danger. I will welcome failure and mistakes if Thou wilt not abandon me. I can fall with Thee, Lord, if Thou wilt help me to bear the failure, to put right the mistakes, and to persevere in spite of weakness. Amen.

XXII—The Fourth Station

Our Lord meets His Mother

IT is not to be believed that our Mother Mary who loved our Lord so much and who loves us should keep away, and have no part in the sufferings of her Son. There is no mention in the Gospel of our Lady's presence until we are told that she stood at the foot of the cross: "There stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother *(John* xix, 25). We cannot believe that St. John would leave her in ignorance of what was happening. When her Son was condemned to death by crucifixion she knew that He would be brought outside the city, and she would be in readiness to meet Him. Her courage had never failed, and it

would not fail now, for she was sustained by the divine courage of her Son. He knew her courage and no doubt he had prepared her for the test of her courage and her love which she had now to meet. He would receive no comfort from her on the way to Calvary; He would simply join her to His own suffering. Nothing but divine power could sustain Him then. But His Mother must be present during His sufferings, and be present as our Mother. She was preparing for her new title, the Mother of Sinners, the Mother of Sorrows.

Probably our Lady chose the first difficult part of the road to Calvary, the spot our Lord had chosen for His first fall. Perhaps He had pointed out the spot to her when as a child He came to Jerusalem with her for the great feasts in the temple, so that the memory of those days is with her as she sees Him beginning the ascent towards Calvary. She sees Him again as a child, and all the tenderness of her heart urges her to help Him to carry His cross. But she knows His will; she knows that He must bear His own cross, and that she is simply to see Him and to love those whose sins He is carrying. She has not added to His burden; she has committed no sin. She is to give for all time the same love to any soul which tries to bear the cross for her Son. Thus, Mary is as ever the link between the soul and the sufferings of her Son, the objects of His love and the causes of His sufferings. She is ever the mediatrix between Jesus and ourselves, as He is the Mediator between God and man. She sympathises both with the love

and the sufferings, as she loves our souls and helps each to bear the sufferings which love urges us to bear. She was not allowed by our Lord to help Him, but she gives us the help she would have given to Him had it been His will. We are united to the sufferings of her Son through the assistance of our Mother. She can encourage us, though she could not encourage Him, for the way to Calvary is the proof to us that all human aid was vain to Him, and that He did not rely upon it. In the life of the soul our Lord would have us robbed apparently of all human aid. The last purification of the soul is not unfrequently brought about by the journey to Calvary, for till I am free from all reliance on man I cannot find myself one with our Lord. The only support in this last purification is the support of union with Him. It is here that my Mother Mary can give me the aid which our Lord did not need, and therefore would not take. She is most perfectly united in heart with her Son, and she will join me with herself if I will trust myself to her. She is a close observer of every detail of the weakness of her Son, therefore all the love she has for Him is turned upon me.

How intensely thou hast desired my correspondence with thee, dear Mother, and how little I have allowed myself to consider thee! Thou seest the difficulties I am faced with, and thou knowest that they are simply the repetition of the difficulties that brought thy Son to the ground. Thou art conscious of the parallel which I fail to see. The cause of depression thou seest to be a repetition of the hard road thy Son

traversed. In the abandonment of those who knew me thou seest a repetition of the abandonment of thy Son to the will of the Jews, and thy heart goes out to the soul who, afar off indeed, but very really, is carrying the cross and falling under its weight. Thou knowest all, and thy divinely illumined mind sees the points of agreement, and encourages the soul to make them more complete. The thought also of thy presence may encourage me to think of my Lord's sufferings and to rise with Him to meet thee in the difficulties which beset me and which at the time seem impossible to overcome. Thy heart is beating in love, thy lips are moving in prayer, therefore will I take courage. Give me, I beseech thee, brave Mother of God, a part in thy courage. Give me a share in thy endurance. Thy trial was much more grievous than any I shall have to bear, but how much less is my strength! With thee I can persevere and be constant. Thou canst help me, dear Mother; thou art willing to exert thy power, the power given to thee by thy Son, to make the souls He loves worthy to follow Him and to bear the cross with Him. Be not indifferent to my cry; do not allow me to be fainthearted. It is thy privilege to bring the strength of thy Son to the weak ones who wish to follow, but who fall in the attempt. I can make no progress unless thou help me.

Mother of Jesus, give me thy courage and thy endurance. Amen.

XXIII—The Fifth Station

"And they forced one Simon a Cyrenian who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and of Rufus, to take up His cross."—*Mark* xv, 21.

AFTER our Lord's first fall the soldiers seek to make the labour of carrying the cross less burdensome to Jesus, and they look for someone to share the burden with Him. Simon of Cyrene coming from the country to the city is passing, and the soldiers seize him, compel him to take the cross and carry it after our Lord. The word of St Mark seems to imply that Simon was to take the cross from the ground, and if so our Lord has not yet risen, or He has risen from His fall, but has not yet taken up the cross. The words of the Gospel may mean that for the rest of the journey our Lord was free of the burden of the cross, and Simon carried it behind Him, or that when Simon had taken up the cross from the spot where it had fallen our Lord once more took it upon His shoulders, but that some of the weight was taken from Him by the help of Simon. The latter seems to be the traditional interpretation, so that the help of Simon is effective in two ways—in taking some of the weight, and in holding up the cross, that the end of it should not knock against the ground. In both these ways the assistance was of value to our Lord—the first in relieving the now exhausted physical strength of our Lord; the second in saving Him from the pain caused by the jolts of the end of

the cross against the uneven road. Still our Lord bears the greater weight of the cross. He is still responsible for the part upon which He is to stretch out His arms to the souls He loves. The cross is His own, and He will not allow anyone to bear the weight of it apart from Himself.

The lesson for me is that however grievous the carrying of my cross may be I can be sure that our Lord has taken the chief burden, and that it becomes bearable only because He still carries it with me.

Then again, the part that our Lord has in my cross is ever that which includes the love of those who have put the cross upon me. Even our Lord would have assistance in His work, and He rewards the help we give Him by giving that goodwill without which our acts have no effect in the spiritual life.

Again, Simon has no conscious or willing part in the work of redemption, but the very contact with our Lord's sufferings made his task, which had at first been unwilling, to become a labour of love. The physical help was greater as the pity for our Lord grew in the heart of Simon, for the labour which at first was only a burden to self and objected to, because of the inconvenience to himself, became by love a burden for our Lord, and self was not thought of.

Thus it is that I do not help our Lord till my love of Him leads me to forget myself, and to place my attention principally on Him. So it is also in the assistance I give to others in pain and difficulty. As long as my mind is concerned with myself my act has a merely physical effect, and does not relieve my

neighbour as it will do when, leaving the thought of myself, I attend to the needs and desires of the one I wish to serve. The one object of all my loving care of others must be my Lord, whom I am helping to bear His cross. In this thought I see a deeper meaning in the word of our Lord: "Unless you deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple."

There is another thought which may be of assistance —Simon's help of our Lord was casual. He had not intended to give it. He had to be forced to carry the cross behind our Lord, and yet he is the only one who was chosen to give the actual example which our Lord gave as the test of those who are worthy of Him. A duty which is forced upon me, which is not chosen by me, may by willing acceptance become the turning act of my life. If instead of resistance I were ready to do a service for our Lord which is imposed on me by the will of another, I may render a service which our Lord will reward by associating me with Himself in the greater works of His own ministry.

Lord Jesus, I thank Thee for thus allowing a stranger to help Thee in Thy work, for Thou showest me how much I have lost by my want of love in the duties which obedience puts upon me. I have considered only my own side. I have complained in my heart of the apparent inconsideration for me of those who take Thy place in my life. I have in this way made difficulties in the carrying out of Thy work. Pardon me, I beseech Thee. Change my heart as

Thou didst change the resistance of Simon. Change my heart that I may think only of Thee, and of how I may forward Thy interests. Open my eyes that I may see Thee in the person of those I can assist. Open my heart that I may love Thee in all the difficulties of charity. Give me the work of saving Thee some of the jolts of the cross on the way to Calvary. Amen.

XXIV—The Sixth Station

Veronica wipes the face of our Lord

THE Church allows us to associate Veronica with the relief of our Lord on the way to Calvary. The story of Veronica, the name given to the unknown woman who obtained the "true image" of the face of our Lord on the handkerchief which she offered Him to wipe His face is dear to the Catholic heart, because it typifies the effect of charity on the soul. The practice of external charity imprints on the heart offered to Jesus the likeness of Jesus, and as the charity deepens the likeness becomes truer.

A true likeness contains many details which belong to the face impressed. In some moods one will be more noticeable than in others. Our Lord chooses the details of His sacred countenance whilst He was on the way to Calvary as the true likeness we may study in order to understand Him. There are many reasons why our Lord should make this choice. As a man who wishes to have his portrait taken strives to choose

a time and state of health in which he will be able to offer himself to the artist at his best, in order that all that is in him may find a place in his picture, so our Lord chooses the time when He is carrying His cross, that He may leave us the memory of Himself which will tell us all that He is to us, and all that He can be. Thus He exerts His divine power, and leaves a record on the handkerchief Veronica offers to Him, which was to be obtainable by every soul that wished to know what manner of man He was. He wishes me to keep in my heart the memory of Him as He carried the cross, because the most personal relation between the soul and God is according to our Lord's own word the carrying of the cross with Him. This makes the soul worthy of Jesus, and therefore He wishes that His image at that time should be a treasure to me. Yet we know that during His journey to Calvary He was scarcely recognisable. For this reason He was clothed in His own garments, that He might be known by those who had been used to the sight of Him.

The memory of my Lord carrying His cross will preserve me from many sins if I can keep it before my mind. Though I may not imagine the true likeness of our Lord, I can at least dwell upon those features of His which were most prominent during any particular incident of His life.

The sanction of the Church to this devotion is a sufficient guarantee to me that there is a use to be made of the pious imaginations of the faithful, even if those pious imaginings do not rest on any actual

fact. I will try then to fix in my heart the presence of my Lord labouring in exhaustion up the hill of Calvary. I will strive to offer Him my heart, that He may imprint the image of His countenance upon it. My heart has in it many pictures to which it turns in love. Grant, dear Lord, that they be never the pictures of sin or of sinful pleasure. Thou art in my heart if it is free from sin, but Thou mayest be there in a hidden or unperceived way. Though Thou art present, Thou wilt not affect my life unless I contemplate Thee. Thy presence will not be to me the object of love, the spring of holy desires and of saintly effort unless I deal with Thee as Thou wouldst deal with me.

As my Lord struggles painfully up the hill of Calvary He is thinking of me. He is carrying my sins, He is putting Himself in my place, and He offers me the image of His love that I may put myself in His place.

Lord Jesus, I have forgotten Thee, I have left Thee out of my life, I have not used the memory of Thee; I have drawn a veil over Thy image that the sight of it might not disturb my ease. How often I have looked at Thee and turned away! I beseech Thee so to impress Thyself upon my heart that I shall never be able to avoid the sight of Thee again. Make Thy likeness so real to me that the thought of Thee will be the first thought in every act of my life. Urge me to turn to Thee in all I do. I know that Thou art ever so urging me, but I pay little heed to Thy advice. I turn away; I allow another to

take the place which Thou alone canst fill. Come to me carrying Thy cross again, and let me see Thy face mourning for the very negligence I am guilty of. Then perhaps, in Thy mercy, I may be moved and turned back again to Thee. How much more in Thy spirit would my life be were I thus to deal with Thee, dear Lord! Thou hast made me the creature of impulse; do Thou allow Thyself to be to me the source of every impulse, the source of all effort. Thou art the Divine Lover of my soul, and Thou comest to impress Thy image upon me, entering into my life in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Here Thou enterest into my soul impressing Thy love, Thy care and Thy self-sacrifice upon me. When shall I respond to Thy love, dear Jesus? Oh, take not Thy love from me because of my carelessness. Make Thy love yet more plain to me, that I be not able to keep my heart from pondering on it. Amen.

XXV—The Seventh Station

Our Lord falls the second time

OF this second fall there is no mention in the Gospel, but the devotion of the faithful has commemorated the difficulties of the journey to Calvary in this way.

As the first fall was a sign of the weakness of the soul unsupported by God, so the second may be taken by us as a proof that human sympathy is of little avail in the trials God brings upon the soul.

After the first fall our Lord meets His Mother; after the second He meets the pious women who are devoted to Him. He is desirous that we should sympathise with Him in His sufferings for our own sake, because the sympathy we give to Him is a test of our union with Him. His sufferings, His labours and His trials, are borne for our sake to show us the value of all such things in life. He, the most perfect, the most innocent, will submit to them, not because they were needed for the completeness of His sanctity, but because they are, in God's dispensation, the necessary accompaniment of our growth in holiness. He so identifies Himself with us that He suffers because we must suffer, and because we avoid suffering which entails humiliation, our Lord would fall under the cross. He, the strong God who made the world and supports it, will allow His human nature to sink under the burden of the cross. But this fall does not hinder His sacrifice. He will not allow weakness to hinder His work. In like manner, He will not allow my weakness to hinder His work. Indeed, if I use the weakness, i.e., bear it and do not seek the sympathy of others, if I humble myself in my weakness and rely on God's strength, my weakness will help forward God's work.

Then again, this second fall teaches me that there is no time in my life when I can promise myself freedom from difficulty, or feel that I am proof against the weaknesses of my nature. Though our Lord had no weakness and no trust in Himself as man, He would fall because many of those who are to follow Him will

be tempted to think that the assaults of the devil will be less fierce as they advance in sacrifice. As a fact, we may be sure that the evil one is preparing a surprise attack if we do not feel the pressure of assault at any time. He is on the watch for an advantageous time and place for attack, and we may be sure that if he is not attacking he is only waiting for an opportunity. Now the simple perseverance in weariness changes his time of opportunity into a time when he has no chance of overcoming the soul. Persevering in spite of weariness saves more souls than energy when no weariness is felt. In spite of His weariness our Lord persevered in His journey. In times of weariness the soul is inclined to seek for sympathy from those who witness the difficulty, therefore our Lord would fall just as He came near the group of women who were ready to give Him all the sympathy they could, and He would not allow their sympathy to buoy Him up. He suffered this second fall, not to warn us against giving what sympathy we can to those who are weary, but to prevent us from relying on it when given to ourselves, for sympathy from our fellow-men if improperly used is capable of separating us from the work of God. It is then for me a cause of rejoicing and of thanksgiving if when my cross is on my shoulders I have no sympathy offered to me.

I thank Thee, Lord, for all the friends Thou hast given me, but I thank Thee more that Thou hast not allowed one to spoil the effort I wish to make to bear the cross with Thee—to meet a second, and if Thou

willest, a third fall. Thou knowest how eager I have been for this sympathy from others. I thank Thee that none have known how much I wished for it, and that therefore no one gave it to me. Bear me up with Thy own perseverance; let me not turn back because the way is weary. Thou alone canst sympathise with me without danger to me. Thou alone canst understand, for the cross has its main value, because Thou hast put it on my shoulders. After all, the cross Thou hast asked me to bear is as nothing to the cross I have put upon Thy shoulders, and I do not understand, only because I do not know Thy love. Thou hast taken the cross I have given Thee and hast made it Thy own for my sake. Truly I should carry the cross for Thee. The strength Thou wilt not use to make Thy burden easier Thou art willing to use to make my cross bearable. I thank Thee, Lord, for the help Thou hast given me; I beseech Thee, as Thou knowest my weakness, to continue to uphold me. Leave me not to myself, or I shall be in danger of abandoning Thee. Leave me not to myself, for Thou knowest I cannot be trusted. I want to give my whole trust to Thee. Let me fall if Thou wishest, but let me rise again to fresh effort. Amen.

XXVI—The Eighth Station

The daughters of Jerusalem mourn for our Lord—*Luke* xxiii, 27.

AS our Lord rises from His second fall and again takes up His cross He pauses to speak to a group of women who had come out full of sympathy

for Him. They weep for pity of Him, and He bids them not to weep for Him, but rather for their own sins which had partly caused His sufferings, and for their children, because if the forces of evil could be so cruel to Himself, they could be much more powerful against them. It is as if He had said: "They cannot harm Me, but you and your children may receive lasting harm." He reminded them that there are worse evils than mere suffering. His sufferings are to be of eternal benefit to the world; their sins will be of eternal hurt to them, if they do not repent. Our Lord does not reject their sympathy, but He tries to turn it from Himself to their own trials. It might seem as if He were telling them that the trials that were to come upon Jerusalem were more grievous than the terrible suffering He was enduring, and indeed the punishment which was to fall on the holy city would fall more severely, as it so often does, upon the innocent. Their attitude to God when undeserved suffering came upon them would determine their use of the suffering. Our Lord warns them of the trials that are to come upon them, and by so doing He prepares them to reap the benefit to themselves. Such calamities are to be judged by their results. If they turn the hearts of many to trust in God they bear great fruit. Indeed, a trial such as the sacking of Jerusalem is more likely to turn souls to God than a great and lasting prosperity. When there is nothing to turn to, when no reliance can be placed on material things, when the very earth seems to be dissolving, then it is that

the hitherto hidden trust in God revives. The whole end of creation is to cast the soul upon God. Thus there is an explanation of great and sudden calamities which shows forth God's goodness. But as there ever remains in the heart of man the capacity of turning from God the effect of such terrors depends upon the soul itself. God's object is the same in all His dealings. When He gives blessings material or spiritual He desires to draw souls to Himself; when He allows evils it is to wean the soul from the world, and make it turn to Him as its only hope. In such calamities the state of the soul towards God depends upon the manner in which the soul has regarded Him at other times. If I accustom myself to live my daily life without reference to God, when trial comes I shall not turn to Him with any readiness. The soul of man is influenced much by the habit of thought which has been encouraged. If I allow myself in ordinary circumstances to think only of the material helps I can summon, my mind will revert to them when calamity comes upon me. If I insist that in ordinary needs my first recourse is to God, then in sudden need my heart will fling itself upon God.

The words of our Lord to these good women are an acknowledgment of the kindness shown to Himself, but in the passion He will receive no support from their kindness. The reference to Himself as the green tree, that is, the perfectly innocent life, only emphasises the horror which is in store for those who have allowed the sap of divine grace to be dried within them. Our Lord's words are an insist-

ence that when real calamity comes on a soul every care for grace and divine help will be of avail, for as divine grace permeates and strengthens the soul, this saving grace is the only help against sudden calamity.

The doctrine of our Lord may refer also to spiritual calamity. Sudden and violent temptation can be met and overcome by the habit of immediate recourse to God and in no other way. If the soul hesitate in this recurrence to God it is open to many a lifelong anxiety able to paralyse future effort. It may seem that violent temptation can be overcome by other means, but experience shows that if the recourse to God is not included the chances are that great anxiety as to consent will be incurred; whereas God rewards the immediate turning to Him by giving a calmness of mind which, if it do not rout the tempter, at least robs the assault of anxiety in the future.

In Thy mercy, Lord Jesus, let me learn the lesson Thou didst give to these women. Sympathy with Thee in Thy sufferings was rewarded by a warning which was to be of great value to them and to their children when the evil day came. Let me also by my contemplation of Thy sufferings gain strength against the evils which threaten both soul and body. Grant me the grace to know Thee in Thy sufferings, that I may know Thee also in Thy triumph. Grant that I too may rely upon Thee in the time of trial. Let me turn to Thee in the very first assault, and wholly trust in Thy help. Thus shall the trial of both body and soul bring me nearer to Thee. Amen.

XXVII—The Ninth Station

The Third Fall of our Lord under the Cross

OUR Lord's first fall on the way to Calvary is in the sight of His Mother, the second in sight of the women of Jerusalem, the third is on the last rise of the hill before the summit is reached. There is no mention of the falls in the holy Gospel, but they have been used in the devotions of the Church to bring home to us the bitter suffering of our Lord, and to rouse in our hearts a greater love for Him.

This third fall shows me that my weakness will not leave me till I am fastened to the cross. The only strength of the soul in suffering is from the cross. The first fall showed me that I could not rely on myself; the second that I could not gain strength from the sympathy of my fellow-men; the third fall teaches me that at last only the nails which fasten me upon the cross can hold me upright. If many in the beginning fall away because of trust in self, and others in the middle of the spiritual life fall because they seek the sympathy of men, there are not a few who in the last steps of sanctity fail to reach the completion of love, because they try to find support apart from the cross.

Our Lord is just at the summit of Calvary, and in sight of the spot where He is to be raised upon the cross. He sees that the cross will support Him now, though it has been so far a heavy burden. The true

value of the cross is known to Him, but He falls that I may see the truth He wishes me to take to heart.

Lord Jesus, grant that when I too feel my weakness and am convinced of the unreliable nature of human sympathy I may, after Thy example, be brave to acknowledge that Thy cross alone will uphold me. May there come a time when I shall make this truth my own, and in Thy strength struggle forward, allowing myself to be fastened to the cross. Thou hast known of this moment all Thy life. The mysterious business of Thy Father to which Thou didst appeal in Thy twelfth year; Thy word "When I shall be lifted up, I will draw all things to Myself," show me now the truth that was in Thee. The cross, then, is the support of the soul in the last struggle, and the sooner I can convince myself of the fact, the more surely shall I be drawn to Thee, and become one with Thee. Truly, suffering accepted for Thee and with Thee is a support which will never fail me. The two principal weaknesses of my nature are put aside by the cross—the weakness from self-love, and the weakness of human love. The cross being chosen by the Father becomes the divine means of the divine love in which alone my soul shall find its strength. The difficulty of resting wholly upon the cross which I find in my own life comes from the want of generosity in the two preliminary renunciations of self and of the support and sympathy of others. The difficulty is that without some self effort and therefore some trust in self it seems that the life is scarcely mine. But the truth is that self must be transformed

into the divine life before the trust in self which seems necessary can cease to be a hindrance. This is the state to which the saints attain. Though they seem to take up a policy and to act in an individual manner in consonance with their characters and training, yet there is no reliance on self as apart from God. In many lives it seems that a certain work cannot be done unless one relies on the loyal co-operation of others, and though such co-operation implies sympathetic feeling, yet the reliance on love of man apart from the love of God robs the life of its supernatural character. The answer here is the same. Till the love of others is seen to be only the manifestation of divine love, and therefore of value to me only because it has God for its source, I use it with danger. The way in which the love of others can be of use is that God is seen and loved and trusted in those with whom I have to work, and whose co-operation I have to depend upon.

Thou askest of me a singleness of view which hitherto I have not understood. Thou hast said that if my eye be single my whole life shall be lightsome. I thank Thee for allowing me to see the meaning of Thy word as Thou reachest the height of Calvary. I thank Thee that Thou remainest the source of the sanctification of my own love, the value to me of all other love. I thank Thee that Thou wilt not allow me to be tried beyond my strength, and if I give myself to Thee Thou wilt allow me in my weakness to find support and comfort in the cross. Thou fallest to show me how pure my heart must be before I can

rely wholly on the cross and Thee—on the cross, because it is Thine, and on Thee hanging on the cross for my sake. Purify and strengthen my weak will, that I may rise with Thee from every fall, and be ready to be fastened to the cross with Thee. Amen.

XXVIII—The Tenth Station

Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

THE executioners took our Lord's garments from Him before crucifying Him. This was the custom, both among the Jews and the Romans. The rough way in which the soldiers strip our Lord adds another suffering, for the inner garment would be fastened to His flesh by the blood which oozed from the wounds made by the scourging, so that each wound was re-opened. There is no need now for the garment which they had put upon Him to ensure His being recognised by the multitude. When He is raised on the cross His position will draw upon Him the revilings of all. The main reason for this last act before His crucifixion was not to give a last indignity to our Lord, but to provide a cheap bribe for the executioners. The clothes of the criminal were the perquisite of the executioners. We have no hint in the Gospel that our Lord took it as an indignity, though according to our modern ideas it is so. The criminal was stripped before execution, that the clothes might not be soiled in the process of execution. We cannot think of these

Roman soldiers wearing the Jewish garments of our Lord. No doubt these were eagerly bought by the disciples or the pious women.

The reason on our Lord's side why He was stripped of His garments was that all might see the wounds in His sacred body. These wounds were to be to countless souls the marks of His lavish love. They were endured for me. There was the wound in His shoulder made by the cross, the wounds from the scourging, the wounds from the falls on the rough and stony path to Calvary, the marks of the rope where He had been bound, and later on, the wound in His sacred side. These were visible during His crucifixion, and were to be visible on the crucifix.

The mystery then of the stripping is the mystery of the unnecessary wounds our Lord suffered to prove to us there was nothing He would not endure to win our love.

In the devotion of the Stations of the Cross we are bidden to condole with our Lord, because His sacred body was exposed to the vulgar gaze of the rude and scoffing multitude; but He is thinking of us, and hoping that when we see the work of our heedless sins we might for love of Him be more careful and more thoughtful in the future. The wounds which were visible when His garments were torn from His bleeding body were not the wounds that redeemed us. His death on the cross was the price of our redemption; all the other wounds were superabundant. They showed the excess of His love. To move one heart to love God He would have endured much

more, but surely there is enough here to move even my heart. How little I have appreciated the generosity of His love! How mean and calculating has been my service of Him! I have weighed carefully every trouble, I have complained of many trials that He has allowed to come upon me. I have thought only of my ease, my time, my self-imposed work, and I have seen difficulties which were suggested to me by the devil, but our Lord's love I have not seen.

Now that Thou hast shown me Thy love, dear Lord, Thy self-sacrifice, I beseech Thee give me the courage to be more generous. Thou art looking for generosity, for Thou canst not unite a soul closely to Thyself unless that soul has a generous spirit. To have part in Thy work demands the essential qualities of that work, for the soul differs from a material thing. Thou canst use the material creation without any change in its nature, for Thou usest it without making Thyself one with it, but the soul of man Thou dost not so use. Thou didst not use the rebel angels, because they would not make Thy spirit their own, and it is the same with man.

Now in Thy work the prevailing quality is generosity —the perfection of love, and Thou showest me Thy spirit when Thou allowest the executioners to strip off Thy garment, that I may see the marks of Thy love. Give me of Thy spirit, that with a generous heart I may offer myself to Thee. I hesitate, because I am not generous with Thee, dear Lord. I do wish

to have part with Thee, but I still love myself more than I love Thee. Grant me the grace to put aside my cowardice and my self-love, that in Thy spirit I may offer myself wholly to Thee. Let Thy love burn in my heart and consume all my self-love. I know Thou canst do it if my will is united to Thine, and if I am willing to follow Thy example. Strip me, I beseech Thee, of the garment of self-love and of selfish consideration, that I may stand with Thee and go forward to the cross, loving Thee with the love with which Thou lovest me. Thou wilt have me generous with Thy own generosity before Thou wilt trust me with Thy most noble work. Shall I hesitate? No, dear Lord, I will look on Thee now ready for Thy last sacrifice.

Lamb of God, about to take away the sins of the world, take away my sins and my cowardice, that with a generous heart I may be united to Thee. Amen.

XXIX—The Eleventh Station

The Nailing of our Lord to the Cross

"And when they had come to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified Him there."—*Luke* xxiii, 33.

THE nailing of our Lord to the cross is the beginning of the sacrifice. The cross is the altar of sacrifice, and the Victim is laid upon it. Then instead of being bound with cords to the cross, the soldiers nail His hands and His feet. The reason seems to have been

to hasten the death by the fresh blood shedding from the four new wounds. Often the culprit was simply bound with cords to the cross, and left to starve, but the victim nailed to the cross was meant to die quickly. The nails kept open a constantly running wound. Our Lord had designed to redeem man by the shedding of His Blood upon the cross, and therefore He was ready to suffer these new wounds, that the sacrifice might be prompt. The drag upon the hands and the weight upon the feet must have been a constant agony to our Lord. He is willing to suffer this agony during the whole time He hangs on the cross, because He sometimes asks His servants to endure some constant pain of mind or body. He uses the wounds in His hands after His resurrection to convince the doubting disciple Thomas. And He uses them now to convince me of the depth of His love for me when I am inclined to doubt it.

Again, He is fastened to the cross by nails through His hands and feet, because these are used, either by man in sin, or are the symbols of powers that must be restrained in the service of God. Thus, many acts of man are prepared for by the hands, and the feet are used to carry a soul to a place or to an occasion of sin. If a guard were kept upon the hands, and the feet would not move towards sin very much sin which is consummated would be avoided.

So again, the hands and the feet are each the symbol of power which can only be safely used when fastened to the cross. Thus, the right hand signifies the power to strike another and must be restrained by the

spirit of the cross. The left hand signifies the power of human love, and this can be exercised safely only when the cross is ever remembered. The right foot signifies the power of prompt action, and this must be restrained by the cross, or it will lead the soul into much sin. The left foot signifies the power of constancy, and this, unless it rest upon the cross, is a danger to the soul, keeping it in a state of sin.

Our Lord had fallen under the weight of the cross when He withdrew His divine, sustaining power, but to keep upright would be impossible to Him when abandoned by His Father if He were not fastened to the cross. He had much to say from the cross, and He would be upright and face the work before Him ; this He did by the support of the nails driven into the cross.

What a lesson He gives me in allowing Himself to be fastened by nails to the cross! Sooner or later He fastens the soul dear to Him to the cross, for He had designed that the cross should be His support in His work for the salvation of man, and in like manner He makes it the support of the soul in the work done for Him.

Moreover, He speaks to the soul through the cross. Every detail has its lesson, every suffering has its purpose. The crucifix is to be a constant source of encouragement in labours which weary hands and feet. The sight of our Lord fastened to the cross will uphold many a faint heart, and will give new strength to many a weary soul.

Give me, I beseech Thee, Lord, the firm support

of Thy cross. I dare not ask Thee to fasten me upon the cross, but I do beg of Thee to make me fit to join myself to Thee on the cross. By the aid of Thy grace I can prepare myself for Thy company in restoring the power Thou hast given me—the power to do a bodily or mental work, the power of human love, the power of prompt action, the power of constancy in any action undertaken. Fasten these to the cross, so that I may exercise none of them, save in the spirit of the cross. Let me not seek myself, but those for whom Thou art suffering. Let me be earnest in work that brings me no reward, but that is by Thy grace of value to Thy friends. I do not ask Thee, Lord, to take human affection from me, but do not allow it to be given in a way in which Thou canst not join me. Give me a promptness in Thy service, yet restrain my quickness of temper, or any retort of action against another. Let me be slow in anger, and considerate in all acts which affect my neighbour.

Lastly, make me constant in all good. Hitherto I have been fitful and inconstant in many acts which I knew to be according to Thy will, and persevering in evil habits resisting the assaults of Thy grace. Oh, fasten me to Thy cross with Thee, that I may have a guard on myself in all things by the strength of the nails which fastened Thee on the altar of the cross. Give me the abiding spirit of sacrifice which I know is the spirit of the cross. Amen.

XXX—The Raising of the Cross

WHILST Jesus was being nailed to the cross the executioners had dug a hole in the earth in which to fix it. In the case of those who were bound to the cross there was no need to fasten them before it was raised and fixed in the ground, but it would be practically impossible to nail a body, as Jesus was nailed, unless it were done on the ground. This raising of the cross added fresh torment to our Lord. Every movement of the cross must have caused acute suffering to the wounds in hands and feet. Every swinging of the cross caused by its weight brought our Lord's body into a new position, and therefore brought a fresh suffering to the wounds. But most of all, the jolt of the cross into the hole prepared for it would widen every wound and renew the agony of the nailing. Then each vibration of the cross as stones or earth were wedged about it to make it steady sent a thrill of pain through the hands and feet. Why did our Lord allow His sacred body to be thus tormented? These pains might have been spared Him had He chosen some other method of death, but He knew what support His pain would be to many a weary soul who through pain was to come near to God. He knew that very few would be completely purified from all manner of self-seeking except by pain. It was for the suffering, pain-racked soul who by means of pain would gain the last victory over self, and be ready for the most complete union with God

that our loving, suffering Lord bore up through all this agony. It was to make the pain of such souls more tolerable that our Lord exposed Himself to these countless sufferings.

God uses pain to take a soul out of itself, to take it from confidence in self and from reliance on any human aid, for though it is possible to dull bodily pain, it is not without danger to soul and body that such means are used. Pain is a power in God's hands to turn the soul of man to Him. He has used it most frequently in the lives of the saints, but He has suffered beforehand in order to make it possible for man to learn the use of pain. There are few pains that are insupportable if one considers what can be gained by them. Here our Lord shows me that I can make all pain a means of union with Him. It is difficult to conceive a more intense pain than this of being raised upon the cross. Our Lord does not shrink, though He knew well all that was before Him, because He had in mind the support, yea even the comfort to be given to His friends in all time from the thought of companionship with Him. He knew what courage the thought that pain was borne for Jesus and with Jesus would give to weak souls. He knew the benefit to the strong who could leave their confidence in themselves and sanctify their sufferings by uniting them with His. Thus, the motive of our Lord is as ever the support and the sanctification of souls.

Alas! how little have I used the means my Lord has given me! I have allowed pain to turn me in upon myself. I have thought myself a victim; I

have exaggerated the pain by dwelling upon it. Instead of looking upon it as a means of union with Jesus, I have considered it only a hindrance. I have made it an excuse for remissness; I have excused myself from effort when a little more effort might have given me the mastery.

Lord Jesus, Thou hast shown me the value of pain in the voluntary pain Thou didst suffer for me and for my sins. Show me also the value of the pain Thou in Thy mercy sendest me. I can co-operate with Thy love by accepting for Thee all the pain Thou willest to send me. Were I to see Thy hand I could more bravely bear and more surely use the means Thou offerest me of taking part with Thee in the sanctification of my soul. I can see how much more surely any pain which I have accepted from Thee has drawn me to Thee than the pleasure Thou hast given me at times, for the accepting of suffering can be a satisfaction to me through a sincere acknowledgment that I am receiving what I deserve, and there is no room for pride, whereas the acceptance of any consolation or pleasure is always a danger to me.

How little has been the trial Thou hast sent me, Lord! I beseech Thee to make me more worthy of these signs of Thy love. I know I am asking for suffering if I ask Thee to increase my love of Thee. My cowardice has kept me back. It was the Father's love for me that made Him put upon Thee the pains of Thy crucifixion. It will be His love that allows me to share Thy pain with Thee. At least, let me

not forget Thee in Thy agony on the cross. Be to me a help and a support. Let me not complain when Thy hand is heavy upon me. Let me see Thy hand in all the small sufferings I have to bear; thus shall I be able to sanctify them; thus shall I join Thee, and grow more like to Thee in the sacrifice of Thyself on the cross. Let me never lose Thy support, the support of Thy loving suffering for me. Amen.

XXXI—The First Word on the Cross

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."—*Luke*, xxiii, 34.

OUR Lord would have us listen to His words from the cross. He teaches us those things which are of chief value in the life of the soul. The first word teaches us to put aside our quite natural feelings of anger, and even our just anger against those who treat us cruelly and unjustly. Our Lord had done nothing but good to the Jews, yet they had brought Him to this cruel death. He takes an extreme case in order to leave no doubt in our minds as to His will that we should be ready to forgive even those who punish us unjustly.

If our Lord had considered Himself He could not have prevented His anger from rising, but He considers only the excuse He can make for His enemies. At least He can pray for them to His Father, and recall the fact that they know not completely the sinfulness of their conduct. They are blinded by

their rulers, and are deceived by the chief priests, so that there is at least this excuse, that they know not what they do. They do not acknowledge our Lord as God, therefore they do not fully know the heinousness of the sin they are committing.

I find myself exaggerating the evil done to me, and especially am I prone to exaggerate the evil intention of those who do me harm. For the most part, I do not know sufficient of their motive to make any judgment about it, but from my own experience I am confident that the motives imputed to me when I have thoughtlessly done harm to others are exaggerated, and that I have not any evil intention in what I do.

Our Lord teaches me to give others the benefit of the same disposition; indeed, to be on the look out for an excuse. My own custom is to brood over the injustice of my enemy's conduct, and exaggerate the evil that I see in it. How different is our Lord's way! He sees only the excuse that can be made, and He prays for His enemies, putting before His Father the excuse He sees.

There is always an excuse, and our Lord begs us in imitation of Him to find that excuse. That which He makes for His enemies is the only excuse He can make, but it is a true one. To make an excuse seems at times a kind of dishonesty, but our Lord shows us that it is the only way in which we can imitate Him. He does not wish us to find a false excuse, but to find a real and true one, and to fix our minds on that, and to plead with God, because of the true view which by forgetting ourselves we are able to take of our enemy.

One of the chief hindrances to the soul in attaining union with God is the habit of thinking only of ourselves, and putting out of our minds the truth we can see of our enemy's conduct if we make the attempt. It often happens that one who appeared to be cruel to me had no such intention, and indeed did not know that I was affected by his actions. Our Lord would have me take a wider and truer view of life than is possible if I look only to myself. To accuse another of being unfeeling towards me is not unfrequently a sign that I do many things without any thought of how my acts are affecting others. Our Lord teaches me in His life and Passion that there is no thought of Himself in any of His actions. They are for the sake of others, and He does not allow the thought of Himself to enter. His point of view is the need of others, and therefore His estimate of souls is so much more true and His judgment so much more gentle than that of other men. It would have been easy for our Lord to have made a case against the Jews and soldiers. The Jews had not hesitated to quote His actions against Him. They had shown ill-will against Him from the beginning of His missionary life. They had opposed Him on many points. They had used force against Him; they had tried to stone Him, and now they had importuned Pilate to go against his better judgment. They had exaggerated the words of our Lord; they had applied them in a way manifestly not meant by our Lord, and yet He could truly say they did not know fully what they were doing, and that was

enough, it was the important point for Him. There was a kind view to be taken even of such conduct as theirs, and our Lord would take it.

Lord Jesus, Thou givest me this lesson in charitable and lenient judgment as Thy first word from the cross. Thou knowest how ready I am to see offence where no offence was meant, and Thou warnest me that even where I cannot doubt the offence I may excuse the motive. Thou wouldst appeal to Thy Father with an excuse that it is difficult for me to accept. I do accept it, Lord. I beseech Thee, put Thy spirit into my heart that I too may join Thee in Thy prayer to the Father. Thou wishest to take away from my heart all bitterness. Thou wouldst have me know that a bitter spirit will not help me to unite myself to Thee, but will prevent my having the part Thou wishest me to have in Thy passion. I thank Thee, Lord. Oh, give me the grace to follow Thy will. Amen.

XXXII—The Thieves

"Then were crucified with Him two thieves: one on the right hand, and one on the left."—*Matth.* xxvii, 38.

OUR Lord was not crucified alone. There were executed with Him two thieves—one a reprobate, and the other whose heart was turned to Him, and who was made into a disciple.

The words of St. Matthew seem to imply that both thieves reviled our Lord, but no doubt the mildness of our Lord's behaviour and the divine kindness of His

prayer for His executioners touched the heart of one and at first silenced him, and then made him a defender of our Lord against the other thief. In his new faith he rebuked his companion and thus repudiated his own former uncharity: "Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation: and we indeed justly, for we receive the just reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done no evil." He acknowledges his own sin, and at once the grace of repentance is given and he turns to our Lord praying, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

The example of the good thief teaches me not to stifle the charitable thought, even when I have joined others in abuse of any one. The grace of self-accusation will be given, and if this is accepted and acted upon the grace of repentance followed by the grace of prayer will be added. I see then how much may depend upon my charitable thought, and how one grace depends upon another. I also see from the way in which our Lord receives the thief's prayer how unlimited is His forgiveness: "Amen, I say to thee: this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." Our Lord has connected the charity of the thief with that of every soul in His word: "Whatsoever you shall do to one of My little ones, you do it to Me." For in the conversion of the thief He allows me to see the grace attached to kind words of Himself: and in the other word said, no doubt, in forecast of the word of the thief He shows me the value of kindness, especially when I myself am in suffering. He wishes

me to see how grace is added to the soul that will think kindly and speak kindly, especially when those about me revile another. If I were to think of my own sins and of the innocence of the one who is abused I should obtain from God the forgiveness of my own sins, for the humble acknowledgment of my sins will be given to me as a reward for my charity in our Lord's name. Then following my acknowledgment of my sins will come the prayer for forgiveness, and I know that my Lord waits only for my repentance to take me again into His favour. May not I find here an explanation of my powerlessness in prayer at times? I know that God sends this apparent powerlessness as a trial to His saints, but may not I find that in my case it is brought upon me by my want of charity? May not the graces given to this poor thief be given to me also if I learn to exercise the same charity which he did? Let me look then to my want of charity if I find it difficult to turn to God in prayer. As a matter of experience I find that anything in the nature of a misunderstanding with my superior or with one of my companions has an immediate effect upon my prayer, rendering my appeal to God cold and difficult, and at times so occupying my mind that prayer seems impossible. This may be from the natural disturbance of such things, but also from the close connection between charity and the power of prayer. Thou, dear Lord, wouldst have me question myself when I find it difficult to pray, whether I am thoughtful enough of the good name of those whom I hear discussed by my companions. If I am not thoughtful of the

reputation of others I am not in a fit state to pray, and I cannot expect God to listen to me if I have no regard to the silent demand for charity in all my relations with those whom God loves. Judging by our Lord's position, the thief might have considered Him to have no reputation, and judging by the jibes of all classes he might have concluded that He was a Man of evil life, but he watched and judged for himself, and no one who did so could fail to see the sublimity of our Lord's life. From silence he advanced to the indefinite belief in the greatness of his fellow-sufferer, and from that to a belief in the reality of the kingdom which He was said to claim. This kingdom was evidently not of this world, or our Lord would not thus be left to die; but if of the next world it behoved him to seek a companionship there which had been forced upon him here.

Thou, Lord, hast given me during my life the belief which this poor thief attained after much effort, and not without suffering, but I have seldom turned to Thee in prayer with a tithe of the earnestness with which he appealed to Thee. Remember me, Lord, in Thy kingdom. Remember me in Thy kingdom of the earth, for the earth is Thine and all that dwell therein. Thy own lot in Thy kingdom of the earth is reviling and abuse; let me, if Thou seest good, share it with Thee. Remember me in Thy kingdom over the souls of men, giving me also a share if it be Thy will, in Thy beneficent work for souls.

Remember me in the kingdom of Thy Father, giving me part as Thy loving subject for all eternity. Amen.

XXXIII—The Reviling

"And they that passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, and saying: 'Vah, Thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days buildest it up again, save Thyself, coming down from the cross.'"—*Mark* xv, 29, 30.

IN the Holy Gospels we read that the people, the scribes, the priests, the rulers and the soldiers reviled our Lord. The position of Calvary near one of the great roads into Jerusalem allowed many passers-by on the way to the city to see our Lord, therefore the people are called by St. Matthew, "they that passed by". Their reviling shows that His trial had become public, and the fact that He had claimed to be the Son of God had been the cause of His condemnation: "If Thou be the Son of God come down from the cross." We know that our Lord could have satisfied their test, but He would thus have ceased to be the example of souls who were to be unjustly condemned and the reviled of all time; therefore He is silent. He answers nothing. The scribes, the chief priests and the elders revile His weakness and His apparent desertion by God: "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him, for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" It is the first time that our Lord has been silent when His Father's power is called in question. He would give the example of silence to those who shall be tempted to doubt God's help coming to them when most needed. The coming down from the cross

would have been dramatic, but it would undoubtedly have been ascribed to magic; but the power to raise Himself from death was the power His Father was going to bestow. He could wait for that. To the Jews it seemed as if our Lord was really abandoned.

To many souls at some period of the spiritual life it seems that they too have no power left to avoid or to repel the strength of the devil. In a state of physical weakness it is not unusual to find a spirit of hopelessness increasing in some souls. External, but very bitter calamities happen to their friends at a time when it seems they have no power to support their own difficulties. The thought suggested by the devil is the thought used to revile our Lord: "You have trusted in God; how is He helping you now? He is trying you beyond your strength; He can have no true regard for you." If in such straits I try to answer the suggestion I am at a loss, for it does at times seem too much for weak human nature. My only hope is in the trust I had in God, and shall have again, though it seems to be unfounded now. God's love cannot be compelled to lighten the burden now. I know it is from Him, and that He will help me to bear it. I do not know how or when, but I do know that He will not suffer me to be tried beyond my strength.

The soldiers revile Him, offering Him vinegar or sour wine, the same that they were drinking. They had joined with the others in mocking Him as the King of the Jews in the court of Pilate; now they join the general mockery: "If Thou be the King of

the Jews, save Thyself." There are others who recall the miracles He had worked before them: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save!" The first word of our Lord on the cross supplied some of them with words of reviling: "How can He pray for those who have crucified Him? He should think of Himself." So it is that everything combines to make His case hopeless, and the weary Jesus, still knowing His Father's love, is silent. He is thinking of me in my trial. He is showing me that it is more according to His will that I should be silent. There are many words our Lord could have used to repel the insults cast upon Him, but He loves silence under rebuke. He will not answer reviling. My inclination is to give an answer that will silence the reviler. Our Lord would not say what He might so easily have said through His knowledge of each one's life. He would not use these weapons. He would have me leave them to His enemies, and not speak, except in prayer.

Lord Jesus, let me learn this lesson of the cross. When I am abused by the words of others I fly to the use of words which will hurt and silence the abuser. I feel hurt; I complain to my friends; I work up my anger, I look for an occasion of retribution, or I sulk and nurse my anger. Thou art silent. I deserve some little at least of what I style the abuse of my companions; there is ever some ground for their adverse opinions; it is often only the unpalatable truth. There was no truth or justice in the jibes flung at Thee, dear Lord. Thou couldst have

come down from the cross; Thou couldst have saved Thyself; Thou couldst have shown Thyself the King of the Jews. Thou wast innocent, yet Thou wast silent.

Alas, Lord, I am no follower of Thine in my attitude towards adverse criticism. Thy thoughts are with Thy enemies, finding an excuse for their cruelty; mine are with myself, finding justification for myself. Thy lips are silent; mine will not hold back the answer to the words of criticism.

Pardon me, Lord, for I have not followed Thee here, but I wish to do so now. The habits of years will make it difficult to be faithful to Thy example. Help me at least by allowing me to see the beauty and the nobility of Thy silence and Thy thought for those who revile Thee. Thou art about to die for them; Thou takest their sins on Thyself, and most nobly atonest to the Father for them. Give me some of Thy own loving spirit that I may be silent and join Thee on the cross. Amen.

XXXIV—The Second Word

"Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise."—*Luke*, xxiii, 43.

RACKED as our Lord is with pain, and distressed by the attitude of His own people towards Him, He is still able to attend to the poor thief at His side. His Father's work is being done by Him for the whole world, but this man requires His help and encouragement, and our Lord gives it to him. He asks to be

remembered when our Lord shall have come into His kingdom, and he is promised immediate reward: "This day". There is some difference of interpretation as to the meaning of the paradise which the thief is promised. We know from our faith that our Lord's soul when separated from His body at death went to comfort the souls of the just who could enter Heaven only after He had opened it for them. By the common belief it was in this place of rest that the soul of the repentant thief joined our Lord. The faith of the thief, his repentance and his prayer were thus immediately accepted by our Lord.

This day is also the time in which He listens to my prayer, and if it be accompanied by faith and sorrow it is promptly and generously answered. My prayer is not answered, then, because of my want of faith or my want of sorrow. My want of faith produces that inattention which proceeds from a want of spiritual earnestness; my want of sorrow, especially that which I should have for my lack of charity, produces a spirit of pride which is fatal to my prayer. There are then two requisites of devout and successful prayer—faith and humility, and my best preparation for my intercourse with God, and my best guarantee of being heard will consist in the enlivening of my faith and the deepening of my humility. As the faith of the good thief grew from the actual contemplation of our Lord's words and actions so shall mine. For the faith required before I can pray with fruit is not so much doctrinal, that is, belief in doctrine, but trust in a person, and this is obtained

only by personal attention on my part. My Lord must live and act in my company and speak in my hearing. This personal attention can be gained through the grace of God, by any one. It is the desire of the Father that we should know and love His beloved Son in whom He is well-pleased.

Besides the personal knowledge of our Lord a realisation of my own part in the intercourse with God is necessary, and this is a conviction of my own nothingness. The good thief attained this attitude from the comparison of himself with our Lord: "We receive the just reward of our deeds, but this Man hath done no evil." Thus the sight of the sinlessness of Jesus brings home the sinfulness of his own life.

It is not indeed necessary to have sinned in order to gain this conviction of one's own nothingness, for our Lady, though immaculate, relied upon nothing else: "Because Thou hast had regard to the lowliness of Thy handmaid, therefore shall all generations call me blessed." But for most of us the acknowledgment of sin is a sure means of obtaining humility. If then my prayer seems useless I must look to my personal trust in God and my humility, for these are the points that require attention. Probably I shall find some want of faith or some want of humility, and it will be my part to take practical steps to make good these defects.

Then again our Lord's answer proves to me that the answer to prayer is found always in a closer companionship with Him. He rewards the faith by trusting the thief; He rewards humility by giving a

promise of His own company. The reward of the prayer of the good thief was given at once, and it is given in the same prompt manner to all true prayer. We may not be conscious of it, but our experience, if carefully weighed, will prove the immediateness of our Lord's answer. There may still remain trial and temptation, but the power to bear both is given, so that the soul will more easily repel temptation or endure trial.

In Thy mercy, grant me the same faith and the same humble opinion of myself in my prayer, that I may receive the same reward. The trial which the thief had to bear, unwillingly at first, became, when it was accepted, the occasion of complete submission to God. Grant that I may also accept any trial Thou sendest me, and humbling myself, may pray to Thee with the same earnestness. Give me, I beseech Thee, the reward of prayer, the reward of closer companionship with Thyself. This is the reward I long for, not present consolation, but a closer drawing to Thyself and the promise of eternal companionship. Give Thyself, dear Lord, as the greatest reward. I ask for nothing less. I will try to be patient, but do not refuse my request. I will strive to wait for Thy time, but do not now take from me the reward Thou offerest. Have mercy on me, Lord, and pardon my want of attention to Thee in the past. Draw me yet closer to Thyself, that with my whole mind and heart I may pray to Thee. Amen.

XXXV—The Mother of the Crucified

"And there stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother."—*John*, xix, 25.

THE presence of our Mother at the foot of the cross is of value to us, enabling each one to contemplate the passion of our Lord with the eyes and in the company of His Mother. She was there by right; indeed, all who were present as friends of our Lord were there as sharing her right. The place of a mother at the death of her son is near him, and Mary had all the virtues of the mother. St. John was there, because she was to be committed to him. Magdalen was there, because the Mother of Jesus loved the soul which Jesus loved. Salome was there because of her relationship to our Lady.

Our Lady is present in order to receive that wider motherhood which was given her by our Lord, whereby in the person of her new son, St. John, she took upon herself the care of all who love our Lord. Thus, though she is present by right, she is present also for our sakes, that she may see all that takes place, and may learn the lesson of the crucifixion, in order to help us to understand it. Our Mother is thinking of us in thinking of and attending to her Son, for she loves those for whom He died. Indeed, at this supreme moment of His love He seems to put aside His own sonship, and as He is giving all for us He will not keep even His Mother for Himself. Her influence upon His human Heart had been so precious to Him, that He will give it to us in the

hope of making us like to Himself, therefore is she at the foot of the cross for our sake.

She stands at the cross. If she were there for Jesus' sake only, we might well believe that her grief would have conquered her, and she would have swooned away. Not a few of those who have studied her at the foot of the cross have depicted her as overcome with grief. But our Lord has told us plainly in the words of the disciple whom He loved that she stood.

A great deal of our following the spirit of our Lord has to do with our attitude towards sorrow. There are few who are not visited by sorrow, and whose sorrow is not a part of their growth in the love of God. But strength to bear up whilst feeling grief is necessary for the full use of sorrow. To give way and lose feeling robs sorrow of its great power to purify the soul. The bravery to bear up is that which makes sorrow of real use to the soul.

Mary would be alert to use for our sake the full burden of sorrow. She would stand that she might be nearer to her Son. He is supported by the cross, but she is to be held upright by the means at our disposal. Seldom is such constancy required of us, but our Lord leaves us no doubt of the value He places upon it by the constancy He demanded of His Mother. Jesus was far more to her than anyone can be to us. She realised His sufferings even more than we can realise our own.

Dear Mother Mary, thou provest to me the value of the sorrow I may be called upon to bear. It is not

very great, yet it can give me part in thy motherly sorrow, and be pleasing to God as thine was. The mystery of sorrow finds its solution in thee. It could not be brought upon thee because of thy own sins, for thou wast without sin. It could not be sent to try thee, for thy Son knew the perfection of thy love of God. It could be to prove to me God's right over me. Why He chose the way of sorrow to prove His right I shall know when He reveals Himself to me in heaven, but at least I can stand and bear the pain with thee, knowing that I deserve much and need to prove my love, at the same time knowing that I am His, and that I cannot be wholly in His hand if I do not take sorrow when He sends it, for sorrow as death nobly borne is the mark of the perfect love of God. Teach me then as thou standest at the foot of the cross the use and the method of meeting sorrow. Thou wast marked out by thy Son as the Mother of Sorrows, for thou becamest our Mother at the foot of the cross. In the hour of the sorrow of thy Son our Lord thou wast given to me for my Mother. Teach me, I beseech thee, to value sorrow when it is sent to me. I can value it in thy company. Thou showest me that sorrow is meant to wean me from self-love, to widen my relations to others. I so often allow it to be only sorrow affecting myself, and forget the value sorrow bravely borne may be to selfish souls.

Then thou teachest me that sorrow is capable of uniting me more closely to God. Is not this the reason why it may help me to leave my own selfish ends and to take upon me God's view of all trial?

Give me then a part in thy sorrow, dear Mother of Sorrows. Share with me thy courage to bear, thy generosity and thy love, that the grace of suffering if it be given to me, may not be unused by me as it has been so often in the past.

Mother of Sorrows, help me to sanctify every sorrow that God may send me. Amen.

XXXVI—The Third Word

"Woman, behold thy Son. After that, He saith to the disciple: 'Behold thy Mother.'"—*John* xix. 26, 27.

OUR Lord's third word from the cross is addressed to His Mother. He is about to give His life for the salvation of man, and to prove the intensity of His desire that we should profit by His sacrifice. He leaves His Mother to teach us how we may walk in His way. Our Lord came down to save us, and He taught us to live after His model, that we might secure that salvation. It is not enough for a soul to accept the grace offered, but it is necessary also to follow, i.e., to walk in the footsteps of our Saviour in order to attain the full result of the grace He gives. It was not without reference to man's salvation that our Lord spent thirty years of His life in the company of His Mother. She was the best resource of a soul desiring to be saved and wishing to learn our Lord's way. She knew Him and watched Him in all circumstances of youth and manhood. She had followed not a little of His missionary career. She knew His most secret thoughts and desires. No one could better help a soul to become like to Him.

Again, we may well believe that the years spent with our Lady were spent in great part in familiar converse with His Mother about His life work, and His divine knowledge was no doubt used to enable her to learn the points of universal importance, and the different ways in which His life was to be imitated by others. There is in each soul an individual way of living the life which she saw so much of. He told her many things which she kept in her heart concerning those who were to share her interest in Him. She is not to be less His Mother because she is given to us. Indeed, her motherhood of our Lord gives a value to her motherly care of all who follow Him and of all who are redeemed by Him. For them was she placed in such close relationship with our Lord; for them did she study Him. And now on His death-bed, the cross, He solemnly commits His brethren to her care, and commends her to the love of all who love Him. Such a solemn act on our Lord's part makes His design very plain, so that Holy Church has always looked upon this word as sanctioning our devotion to our Mother.

Indeed, so solemn an act must make me pause and seriously ask myself whether I am carrying out the wish of my Lord in the treatment of His Mother. He has given her to me to hold the same place in my regard that she held in His life, and conversely, to be honoured and obeyed with the same submission which He gave to her. He might have assumed our nature without owing so much to a woman, but for our sake He would come as He did. He would look

to a mother for the tenderness of guardianship, the sacrifices of family life, the care of His childhood, and so much did He desire that all should be devoted to His Mother that He would remain under her roof working for her and sharing His life with her long after the majority of sons cease to remain in the family. He would teach us also to have a like relation to His Mother. He would have us beholden to her for many favours. He would have us remain under her guardianship throughout our whole life.

Dear Mother Mary, my Mother, given to me by thy own Child Jesus, thou wilt not refuse to help me, for I need thy help in all that I do for thy Son. I need thy watchful care. As thou didst guard thy Son Jesus from all harm when He was a child, so do thou guard me through my whole life. Thou hadst only to guard His body which thou hadst been instrumental in giving Him, for His soul was in direct union with God always. Thou wilt have to guard my soul so far removed from God. Thou must take charge of my thoughts, making them such as thou knowest were His. Thou knowest better than any other the thoughts of His mind, the desires of His Heart. Bring to my mind the same thoughts, the same desires. Thou knowest His love of perfection, His love of His Father's work. Give me also a like love of all that is noble, a like devotion to the salvation of souls. Thou hast seen the tender charity of Jesus; teach me how I may imitate Him. I know that I am easily roused to resentment, easily led to anger, easily turned to selfishness. Thou canst help me to

overcome myself, for thou hast known the long-suffering patience of thy Son, the meekness of His life, the utter unselfishness of His Heart. Thou canst not fulfil the office He has given thee unless thou helpest me to become like to Him.

In thy care for me arouse in my heart, I beseech thee, a great love of thee. Thy Son has made it plain to me that He wished me to give thee my confidence. Thou wilt devote thyself to me if I am devoted to thee. Help me particularly to give thee a devotion which will secure to me thy constant care. Help me to do my part, to give the attention to thee which a child owes to its mother. How happy shall I be if through thee I can give thy Son the love and service He asks of me! There can be no greater proof of His love of me than the gift of thyself. There is no surer way to return His love than the devotion He urges me to give to thee. Amen.

XXXVII—The Darkness during the Crucifixion

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole earth until the ninth hour."—*Matth.* xxvii, 45.

SOME have said that the darkness over the whole earth at the crucifixion of our Lord mentioned by the three Evangelists was an eclipse of the sun, but this would be impossible as the Pasch was fixed for the time of the full moon. The only explanation of it would be that there was a clouding over of the sky so dense as to make a noticeable darkness. The fact

that it is mentioned by three Evangelists is proof that it was extraordinary. The phenomenon is not uncommon before a severe earthquake, and we are particularly told that the earth was moved after the death of our Lord. It is not necessary to consider especially the darkness produced. In any case the trial of darkness was a trial to which our Lord subjected Himself.

Darkness has a distressing effect on some souls, and our Lord would have them be safe in His company. Every action, every circumstance of His passion happens for the sake of the souls He loves. In all circumstances of life, in every trial, the least as well as the greatest, the weakness of the soul may be strengthened by the company of our Lord. He would consecrate to Himself that weariness and pain which so many suffer during the night when sick and in pain everyone can know that however helpless he may seem to be he can always have the support and the company of Jesus. He hung upon His cross whilst the light of the sun was hidden.

Darkness gives cause for fear, because the guidance of the eye which is the principal means given to us to protect ourselves against danger is taken away. Moreover, the sense of hearing often becomes more acute, and the sounds which are usual and easily accounted for in the light are exaggerated in the dark and seem abnormal and become a cause of fear.

Our Lord shows us that there is no cause of fear as long as we stand with His Mother near the cross.

God tries the majority of those whom He calls to

His service at one time or another with the trial of darkness. The soul has no light in prayer, and prayer seems to have no result on the soul. It is simply a time of struggle, either to be wakeful or to keep out distractions, and what was once a time of spiritual refreshment becomes a time of trial and leaves the soul almost dead. Joined to this trial there is often a darkness as to the faith which is very hard to bear. The light which has been unquestioningly followed for years is called in question. I know that it is a temptation of the devil, but if I give any time to the temptation the reasons adduced are so difficult to answer; they have never been presented before, or if so, they have never appeared so strong as they do now, and the soul feels that the sure ground of faith is taken from it. This is indeed a trial which is severe and distressing. The soul is not conscious of consenting to the thought against faith, and yet the argument suggested seems so plausible, the question asked by the mind seems so pertinent, that the poor soul is in doubt. Then the memory of the darkness that was upon the face of the earth encourages me to keep near the cross, to keep near to my Lord who endured so much to bring faith to my soul. I may recall the constancy of our Lord who was in the like darkness and did not forget me in my trial. Usually this trial is of short duration, but when it comes towards the end of life it is very bitter. The only resource is in earnest prayer. Then if the soul has been accustomed throughout life to have recourse to Jesus in lesser trials, to trust Him, and therefore surely

to experience His help, the almost natural instinct, coming from long practice, will secure reliance on our Lord in such a manner that not even these assaults will be able to disturb it for more than a moment.

O Lord Jesus, enduring this trial for me, give me the grace so to rely on Thee in life, that I may rely on Thee wholly when the darkness of trial comes upon me. Thou art approaching the act of Thy divine will, Thy submission to the death demanded of Thee as the price of my redemption. Thou wilt not allow me to doubt Thee in the time of trial. Thou art my only hope, my only strength. Do not abandon me, Lord. To whom shall I turn in my distress but to Thee?

Dear Mother Mary, standing so bravely at the foot of the cross, obtain for me a share in thy constancy. Thou didst not doubt, because thou hadst kept close to thy Son in thy life, and now thou art not separated from Him in the day of trial. Oh, turn my thoughts with thine to the sacrifice of thy Son, that I may look to Him and rely on Him with thee when the darkness of temptation assails me. Amen.

XXXVIII—The Fourth Word

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying: 'Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'"—*Matth.* xxvii, 46.

THE fourth word from the cross is one which was spoken especially for those who strive to follow our Lord, not only by obeying the Church in external observance, but by putting before themselves the

attainment of perfection in every act of their souls and giving themselves to a life of prayer. Our Lord has by the regulations of the Church imposed small and light burdens of external observance, and has left much freedom in such matters. This is one principal difference between the Old Law and the New. The demands, however, on the interior life are more far-reaching, more exacting. There is no act of soul or body which is not affected by the claim of perfection. Attached to the work of perfection there seems to be ever found the feeling of hopelessness. Sooner or later this feeling takes hold of the soul, and apparently the more spiritual the claim of God, the deeper is the desolation experienced. Concerning this desolation so much has been said by writers on the spiritual life and on prayer that the self-centred soul is liable to imagine that the great desolation is being suffered when, as a fact, the whole effect is explained by the lack of generosity of the soul itself. The devil is on the alert to make souls think they are suffering when really they are only lazy. For this reason our Lord no doubt shortly after the cry of desolation added the word: "It is finished", to give me the test which should prevent me from taking pride in the desolation, and make me bestir myself to do more generously what I know God asks of me. I must suspect the smallest feeling of elation, because I feel deserted by God, for that is a sign that the devil has had part in the experience I am going through. Pride and self-satisfaction can be used to spoil the work of the hand of God.

But if pride is put aside there is no more purifying experience of a soul than the desolation which God brings upon the souls He loves.

Therefore, we find the cry of desolation the central word of the teaching from the cross. It will be well to note the marks of the devil's influence that when God sends this treasure we may guard it from the assaults of the most astute enemy of the soul.

The first mark is to compare what I experience with what has been recorded of the saints. I look for guidance to those who have suffered the same desolation, and I find my experience the same, or sufficiently alike to make me believe that I am undergoing the same trial. Then I ask others, and the devil brings to me some one who is humble in heart, and I learn that the experience has not been granted to this one. Then the devil suggests to me that I am more advanced and more like to the saints.

The second mark is the disinclination to take advice, and the growing conviction that no one understands my case. Then follows the attempt to guide myself in dealing with the trial I am suffering. I must be on my guard if this spirit takes hold of me, and though direction seems to be of little avail, I may be sure that self-direction is not God's will.

The third mark of the devil's influence is the inclination to leave the common way in the devotions commended by the Church. When this inclination is accompanied by depreciation of common devotions it is an almost certain sign of delusion.

There are other marks of the devil's work, but these are the usual ones with which he enables us to recognise his hand, and the wise will be on their guard when they find the mark of the evil one in their souls. Desolation which leads to pride in any of these ways has no part in the desolation of our Lord on the cross.

Lord Jesus, Thou didst allow Thy soul to feel the pain of dereliction on the cross; grant that I may have part with Thee when Thou sendest me the same trial. Do not allow me to bring pride into my heart, and thus spoil Thy action in my soul. The greater the grace of following Thee, dear Lord, and of experiencing the dereliction Thou didst experience on the cross, the greater is the need I have for Thy protection. I beseech Thee to preserve me now from all pride, that when the trial comes to me I may be humble in Thy hand. Thou hast said: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of Heart," and I see how needful Thy lesson is in the time of desolation. Help me to be humble in giving to Thee the praise of all that I may by Thy grace do for Thee. Make me humble in my thanks to Thee for all that Thou allowest me to do. Thou knowest, Lord, what a hideous failure I should be if Thou didst not help me. Thou knowest what slender grounds I have for any glory in what I do or can do for Thee. To Thee be all the glory, to Thee be all the praise. Save me from a proud comparison of self with others. Save me from the thought that I can get advice from no one. Save me from wandering from the common way of the Church, that in a humble spirit I may be able to

face and to use to the best advantage the trial of desolation if Thou seest good to send it to me.

Into Thy hands, Lord Jesus, I commit my soul. Amen.

XXXIX—The Fifth Word

"I thirst."—*John* xix, 28.

OUR Lord's fifth word on the cross is the second which concerns Himself. The first three words concerned those who were near Him. The fourth tells us of His mental suffering, and this one of His bodily suffering. As in all things which concern Himself, our Lord carries out all that has been prepared for Him by the Father. In the 68th psalm we read: "In My thirst they offered Me vinegar." This prophecy had not yet been fulfilled, thus, to fulfil all things and to leave nothing that had been prepared for Him He would allow Himself to suffer so intensely the trial of thirst. There was a vessel full of vinegar, and one of the soldiers who stood by dipped a sponge into it and offered it to Jesus. Our Lord had refused the draught of vinegar offered to Him before He was nailed to the cross; the drop which He tasted now was to enable Him to speak the last words. It is probable that the act of the soldier in offering the vinegar to moisten the lips of our Lord was an act of compassion. It had been offered before in mockery, and our Lord would not take it; it had also been offered as an anæsthetic. We are told that this was

not unusual in the case of executions. Now, however, our Lord tastes the vinegar offered to Him. He would have me not repel kindness, even if it be rude.

No doubt our Lord did cry out from the pang of bodily thirst, but we cannot forget that He must have had in His mind the real object of His passion, and that His bodily thirst was only the sign of the soul thirst which consumed Him for those for whom He died.

His cry, then, "I thirst," may be and has been taken by the Church as the cry of His Heart for souls. He wishes me to hear this cry, to join my heart with it. Jesus loves the zeal of His friends for the souls He loves so much, that even on the cross He will remind me of it. Zeal for souls consumes Him, and He would have it take hold of me. He speaks of it after the desolation to let me know that the result of desolation rightly borne for Him is zeal. The desolation He has gone through has its supernatural result in zeal. Zeal such as our Lord's is fed by the trial His soul has gone through. Here He gives me a test of my use of personal trial. Instead of allowing such trial to turn me within myself to make me bemoan my fate He would have me look for some object of zeal for Him. The question of my heart should be not, "What can I have done to merit this agony?" but rather, "What can I do for another soul to draw it nearer to God?" This is our Lord's example. The vehemence of His zeal could scarcely be pictured for us more forcibly than by thirst. He had hung on the cross for nearly three hours. He had not tasted food

or moistened His mouth since the last supper on the evening of the previous day. His bodily thirst was naturally intense. The thirst of His Heart for my soul was even more intense. How He puts me to shame in my want of zeal for souls! I count the inconveniences to myself. I sum up the loss of time entailed. I put difficulties in the way, and I do not think of my Lord's thirst and of His kindness in allowing me to allay it by my work for souls. There is no life, however occupied, that cannot spare the time for some work of zeal. There is no trial which cannot be borne for God if I will open my heart to the care of others. Indeed, I cannot imitate our Lord faithfully whilst I exclude the works of zeal.

Lord Jesus, let me hear the cry of Thy Heart and turn myself to the work Thou showest me. In Thy mercy, let me learn this lesson from Thee as Thou hangest upon the cross. I am very slow to see how I can give Thee to drink of the wine Thou desirest. Thy thirst is never wholly satisfied, but Thou allowest me to slake it just a little. Thy thirst was for souls, and a little kindness on my part will do more to help souls to Thee than anything I can do in pity of myself. Thou showest me Thy great longing for my help. Grant me the grace to see the occasions of giving it to Thee. This is where I fail; I am not quick to see a service I can do for Thee. By long neglect, by long selfishness there is a readiness on my part to see where advantage can be taken for my own desires. Would that I could learn to be equally, yea, more prompt to see the occasions of service for Thee! Alas!

a slight inconvenience to myself will often stand in the way of an effort for the sake of another which would help Thee in Thy thirst for souls! I cannot ask Thee to give me the thirst which consumed Thy soul on the cross, but I do ask Thee to help me to put aside the desire for my own ease and my own inclination, that I may be ready to work for Thee.

Lord Jesus, Thou art good indeed to let me do anything for Thee. In Thy mercy, let me not neglect the service Thou offerest me. Amen.

XL—The Sixth Word

"It is consummated."—*John* xix, 30.

THE sixth word on the cross is one which concerns the spiritual life of every follower of Jesus. It is the assertion that in spite of all the suffering of the passion He had omitted nothing of those things which His Father had demanded of Him. He had felt to the full the bodily and mental suffering of His passion, any of them an excuse for leaving out some act which would shorten His agony. This word tells me that He would make no omission.

There is in the life of some souls a constant danger of allowing consideration of self to lead to the omission of some act which, though not vital to the progress of the soul, has been found to be very useful in the past, or is, by universal opinion, of great importance. There are many such acts in life, some of more importance in the life of some souls than in that of others. There

are some exercises without which the soul cannot live a vigorous life, as are prayer and Holy Communion and some amount of self-restraint; but there are many actual practices which not only suit, but are of great importance to some, and of quite secondary importance to others, as voluntary bodily mortifications, or some particular methods of mental prayer, or very great actual charity.

In our Lord's passion there were many acts which were not in themselves necessary for His work, i.e., for the redemption of man, and yet were chosen by the Father and carefully foreseen by the prophets. Our Lord joined these to the essential acts necessary for the salvation and redemption of mankind, and of these He speaks when He says, "It is consummated." He has left nothing out which was in any way commanded by His Father. Thus, the many indignities offered to Him were not necessary for our salvation, but they were willed by the Father to help weak souls who in suffering indignities should lose heart because they were unjustly treated by their neighbours. Again, the carrying of the cross on His own shoulders was an act which did not add to the essential sacrifice, but would encourage many who were given the burden of authority to bear uncomplainingly a suffering which none who have not carried it can truly estimate. These and many other sufferings of the passion were undertaken, not because of their own intrinsic value or their necessary connection with the redemption of man, but that no soul might be without the help of the personal love of God in the trials that are peculiar to his life.

"It is consummated" means, then, not only that the price of redemption is paid, but that every help had been given to the soul which the Father in His love wished His Son to provide for man. Thus, the personal love of our Lord and of the Father for each individual soul is apparent in every act of our Lord's life, if only our eyes are open to see it.

Moreover, our Lord wishes especially to show me how faithful He wishes me to be in the exact performance of the will of His Father. In my life the will of God does not confine itself to the important events of life only, but can be known in every act of life. Sometimes it is insistent, and I cannot oppose it without losing the very life of my soul. Sometimes the neglect does not rob me of life indeed, but it reduces the vigour of that life, and sometimes it only takes from me the help which would make my life more perfect in God's sight; but there is equally in all these cases the will of my Father calling me. The call to exactness in matters which do not entail sin is the call of my Father, and the attention to that call is demanded from me with a fidelity on which life depends in some cases, and friendship and favour in others.

Help me, dear Lord, to be as careful as Thou wast in Thy answer to the will of Thy Father. Thou showest me a fidelity which is much wanting in my life. My excuse is at times, "It is not a sin. I can do this without sin." But if I had Thy spirit my only excuse would be, "This is not the will of my Father"; or, "I can follow the will of God exactly if I do this."

This, dear Lord, is a high standard of conduct, but Thou dost not wish any soul Thou hast made to live according to any lower standard. This is the example Thou givest me when on the cross Thou sayest: "It is finished." How much of my failure has been in omission rather than in commission! The cowardly spirit I have shown has led me to stand back and not to act when Thou wast calling for a little more energy and a little more fidelity. Alas! I see now how backward I have been, and more from laziness and self-seeking than from malice; yet how mean I have been towards Thee! Thou wast so faithful to Thy Father's design, that Thou wouldst not die before Thou hadst moistened Thy lips with vinegar, because He had put into the mind of a prophet the picture of Thee having to slake Thy thirst with vinegar. Thou showest me in how small and apparently insignificant acts Thy will may be found were I on the alert for the promptings of Thy will in these small actions, and how difficult it would be to disregard it in the greater. Let the dominion of Thy holy will so spread throughout my life, that there may be no thought, word or deed of mine that is not wholly submitted to Thee. Amen.

XLI—The Twelfth Station and the Seventh Word

"And Jesus crying with a loud voice, said: 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit,' and saying this He gave up the ghost."—*Luke*, xxiii, 46.

THE last word of our Lord on the cross is that in which He teaches us how to die. The sacrifice of death was in His case a completely voluntary sacrifice. Our death cannot be so except in the death of the martyr, but the quality of our surrender must be after the model of our Lord's. God demands death from all. There must be a surrender of life either willing or forced. If the surrender is willing then death has a value beyond any other act of man. If it be forced then death has a horror beyond any other fear. The completeness of the surrender will be the fact which gives death its value. The surrender of life is given by our Lord as the supreme test of friendship, that is, of love: "No man can do more for his friend than give his life." Our Lord is showing me that His words are no mere words, but the counterpart of His deeds. Not only does He give His life, but He gives it back to the Father. He makes His surrender the seal of His lifelong obedience. He teaches me that if I am to gain with Him the full value of death I must follow Him in the complete submission of obedience during life. It is this which will give me the power to die in complete submission to God. Death is no more than the crowning act of life. There are rare instances

of heroic submission just at the moment of death, but I cannot promise myself that I shall have the grace to make this submission. Our Lord appeals to His life as the preparation for His death. Moreover, He shows me the spirit in which my surrender must be made, for He gives His soul with all confidence into the hands of His Father: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

This, then, is to be my preparation for a perfect death—surrender of self in obedience and in confidence. Alas! how far I have been from the nobility of my Lord's self-surrender! I have indeed given Him myself by my profession, yet in how many ways I have taken from the completeness of that surrender! On innumerable occasions I have sought to take back some part of that which I have given. I have taken my time for myself when I was conscious that I had given it to God, and that He was demanding it of me. I would not disturb my ease, though the needs of others demanded my attention, and I knew that if there were needs I could supply God's will was that I should do what was in my power to satisfy them. It is by sacrifices of this kind that I am to prepare for the supreme surrender of myself at the time of death.

The principles before the mind of our Lord at the point of death should be the guiding principles of my life. They give me the attitude of mind which will secure to me the surrender which will ensure the acceptance of my last sacrifice when God calls upon me to make it. Our Lord would have me ask myself

in any conflict between my own will and that of God: "What shall I be glad of having done when I come to die?" In order to answer this question aright I must put myself at the foot of the cross and listen carefully to this last word of our Lord: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." What purity of motive, what zeal for good, what forgetfulness of self, what trust in God must be mine before I can join my Lord and utter this word with Him! No excuse for laziness, no selfishness will allow me to join myself to Jesus in this last surrender of Himself into the hands of His Father. I see that there is much to do before I can with sincerity unite myself to my Lord at this moment.

Our Lord's words do not only give me the principles I require, but they also give me the power to apply them, for His sacrifice reaches me and His sacrifice is life-giving. It was made for me, that by the grace He bought for me at that moment I might leave sin and gain the strength to follow His example. This sacrifice was made for me to show me how to make the principles of His life my own, and to meet all the difficulties of life, no longer in my own power, but in the power of the death of my Saviour.

Jesus, Son of God, give me, I beseech Thee, such an appreciation of Thy words to me from the cross, that they may be in my heart at all times. Bring them to my mind when Thou seest any hesitation on my part, when I weigh self with Thee, self-will with Thy will, and let me hear Thy word: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," turning my heart

wholly to Thee and to Thy holy will. Can I hesitate when I know Thy will? Alas! I know from past experience how slow I am to be generous in my surrender to Thee, how ready to take back what I have once given to Thee. I know the drag of laziness, the drag of self; oh, let me see the folly and the danger of such conduct in the light of Thy zealous and unselfish words. Would that I could keep near the cross, that I might hear Thy words and make Thy sacrifice the standard of my whole life. I know, Lord, that Thou givest Thyself to me to help my weakness, to purify my heart, to strengthen my weak resolves, to clear the vision of my soul. Speak, then, dear Lord, to my heart and encourage me by Thy word, that I may be a worthy disciple. Encourage me to love Thee, so that self shall have no power to weaken the surrender of my heart to Thee. Amen.

XLII—The Miracles at our Lord's Death

"And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst."—*Luke*, xxiii, 45.

WE read that at the moment of our Lord's death there were some extraordinary happenings. First, the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom. The earth was shaken, and the tombs of the dead were opened, and many bodies of the saints appeared to several people in the city.

The veil of the temple was put up to ensure proper reverence towards the Holy of Holies. This chamber in the temple wherein rested the ark of the covenant

opened into the court of the priests, and was guarded by a thick wall in which was a door. Beyond the door was the first veil or curtain, and beyond this again was the great veil which hung before the ark. Now that the true Ark had sealed by His death the new covenant between God and man the veil was no longer necessary to hide from the eyes of men the ark containing the covenant which had been accomplished on Calvary. Because men would cling to the old covenant God by an act of superhuman power destroyed the veil.

The second cause of wonder was the earthquake. These are not of unfrequent occurrence, and it may be taken to have been of unusual violence in order to be mentioned.

The third wonder was the opening of the graves. The hill of Calvary was a place of burial. The doors of the sepulchres were frequently closed by upright slabs of stone. These would be loosened and thrown down by the earthquake, and after the resurrection many of the bodies were again vivified, and came into the city.

The miracles, then, which accompanied the death of our Lord were wrought in the temple, on the earth and in the graves. The first marked the completion of the Law; the second, the response of all creation to the grace of the passion, and the third typified the new grace given to those who had died in hope of the resurrection of Christ.

It was by the death of our Lord that the Old Law was completed and the covenant ended. It is in

the death of our Lord that a more spiritual law was given to men, and a more spiritual covenant to be completed only in heaven was made between God and man. The character of the former covenant was earthly; the character of the new covenant was heavenly. The means of fulfilling the former was the power of God acting upon the nature of man; the means of fulfilling the second was the Blood of Christ joining itself to the soul of man. In the Old Law the blood of the victim was to be poured about the altar, and not to be partaken of by those who offered sacrifice. In the new covenant the Blood of the Victim is to be the support of all effort. The old covenant was put aside by the death of our Lord, and the new was inaugurated in His death. In like manner, as the Old Law was given in storm and earthquake on Mount Sinai, so it was completed in earthquake and darkness on Calvary.

Lastly, the graves were opened at the crucifixion, but the coming out of the dead was delayed till the resurrection of our Lord. The wonderful events all marked the value of the sacrifice of the cross, the ending of the Old Law, the terror of the earth, and the beginning of the new life. As the Old Law was completed in the cross, so the earthly character of the Old Testament called for the crucifixion of all that was earthly, that the soul might rise out of earthly things to follow our Lord in a newness of spirit.

I beseech Thee, Lord, by the power of Thy cross to destroy in me the tendencies of my animal and

earthly nature, that in Thy spirit I may begin to live in the new spirit of Thy passion and death.

Thou wouldst have me gain the control of all the the forces of my nature, that with full deliberation I may follow Thee. Deliver me from the death of earthly aims and earthly rewards, for to follow them and to seek for them is truly the death of the spiritual life. Let me take my place by Thy cross, and learn the lesson of Thy conquest. I am inclined to consider earthly things at too great a value. As long as I am on this earth I must have some thought for them, but do Thou allow me to make that care concern others rather than myself. This will enable me to disregard them as they concern me, and yet to have all the care Thou wishest me to have for others. In Thy mercy, let me not lose the spiritual rewards Thou offerest me. Only in Thy power and by following Thy example can I be free from the defilement which anxiety for earthly things brings. Thou hadst no regard for all these things on the cross. Thou wast stripped of Thy clothing, Thou wast hanging upon Thy hands and feet, Thou wast without all comfort, yet Thou hast provided for Thy disciples all that can be needed.

I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy care in teaching me from the cross. Let me stand by Thee till all that is of earth has lost its power over me, and I am as Thou willest me to be. Amen.

XLIII—The Conversion of the Centurion

"Now the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus, having seen the earthquake and the things that were done, were sore afraid, saying: 'Indeed this was the Son of God.'"—*Matth.* xxvii. 54.

THE events which followed the death of our Lord show how immediately the work of the passion had effect. The earth acknowledges the power of God. The conclusion of the old dispensation was marked by the veil in the temple being rent. The graves of those buried at Jerusalem were opened; but for us the most consoling effect is that upon the centurion. He has stood on watch since our Lord was nailed on the cross. He has heard our Lord's words. He has seen the conduct of those who passed by, and of the crowd who stayed to revile our Lord. He has heard Him call on His Father. He has seen the divine kindness of our Lord towards His executioners. He has witnessed His dereliction, and by the grace of God he has been able to understand in part what has been enacted before him. The virtue of our Lord and His power over nature lead him to acknowledge our Lord as no ordinary criminal, and the three hours' experience of our Lord's conduct has convinced him that there is truth in His claim to be the Son of God. He had heard Him call upon His Father twice—in the first and last words from the cross, and the depth of feeling and of filial affection in this last cry suggest to his mind the words: "Truly this Man was the Son of God." The effect produced

by the watch of the centurion shows me how great can be the effect on my own heart of the contemplation of the passion and death of our Lord. I can too, with the aid of the Gospel, take my stand over against the cross. I too can listen and try to understand. I can allow myself to be interested; I can live through those three hours again and again. I can beseech God to bestow on me the grace given to the centurion, and I can convince myself that our Lord is truly the Son of God. The result of that acknowledgment in the centurion's case we are not told, save that it urged him not to allow the soldiers to break our Lord's legs later on. The guarding of the body of our Lord was a great grace to him, for he learnt to appreciate our Lord, and to do Him a favour which preserved for us the very body of our Lord unbroken. It is doubtful whether this same centurion opened the side of our Lord with his spear, as St. John tells us that one of the soldiers opened His side, but the evangelist does not mention the centurion apart from the soldiers, so that the tradition of the Church is to be followed, and we may believe that the last act of the passion was performed by this man who acknowledged our Lord to be the Son of God.

At times I have to take my place as the guard of our Lord in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and the centurion teaches me to watch our Lord carefully, to listen to His words, to note His demeanour, and to grow in appreciation of Him. If this stranger came to acknowledge Him in so short a time I should not be so indifferent to Him as I so often find myself.

If I could but rouse myself to attend to our Lord when I am watching before Him there would be a corresponding change in my devotion to Him. Would that I did truly look up to Him as the Son of God

If it was the centurion who pierced the side of our Lord we may well believe it was to save Him other indignities, and as a fact this wound in His side has been made by the Fathers of the Church the source of grace to the whole world. It is at least the symbol of our Lord's generosity in allowing the last drop of His blood to be shed. Though the wound in His side was not the cause of His death, it does convince us of the reality of His death, and the mark of the wound is for all time the mark of the love of the Sacred Heart. Thus it is that our Lord allows this stranger to act for our sake. We cannot think of the centurion without thanking him for the wound in our Lord's side, for our Lord made use of this wound to re-awaken faith in the heart of His disciple Thomas.

Lord Jesus, let me also stand over against Thy cross and keep watch over Thee. Let me never lose sight of Thee again. In Thy mercy, help me to control my wandering thoughts when I am in Thy presence. Do Thou open my heart with the spear of Thy love, that I may give Thee all the love it is capable of, for Thou art watching my sacrifice for Thee as Thou wouldst have me watch Thy sacrifice for me. Would that I could think of Thee always as interested in all I do! Alas! my words are often no consolation to Thee, but Thy words might live in my memory and convince me of Thy love. My

interests in life do not appear to have any relation to Thee, but the interests of Thy Heart I see are all for me. Alas! how unequal is my love to Thine! I cannot doubt that on the cross and in the Blessed Sacrament Thou art ever thinking of me and working for my good. Grant me the grace to stand before Thee and learn Thy love, that with ever-increasing generosity I may answer Thy love with my own. Truly Thou art the Son of God, and by Thy death Thou hast made it possible for me to become also a child of God. Give me some little of Thy love for the Father, that I may fix my eyes on Thee and grow in knowledge and love of Thee. Amen.

XLIV—The Wound in our Lord's side

"One of the soldiers with a spear opened His side, and immediately there came out blood and water."—*John*, xix, 34.

THE wound inflicted on our Lord's body after death is the only one which He did not feel. His soul had already left His body, thus it has never been considered as a cruelty, because it gave no pain to our Lord. The reason why He allowed His side to be pierced was that we might not have any doubt of His death. Now that He is dead He can allow His body to be pierced, though He did not wish to be slain in this way, because His death was wholly voluntary. It was the sacrifice of His divine will; but if His side had not been opened and His Heart pierced some might have doubted His death. Death

was the sacrifice which was accepted by the Father. It was to secure our faith that our Lord would receive this wound.

Another reason given by not a few of the doctors of the Church is that the blood and water still around His Heart might be shed, symbolising the sacramental system which His death established. The water was to signify the sacrament of baptism, and the blood signified the Blessed Sacrament, and after that, the rest of the sacraments which apply to particular circumstances the power of the blood of Christ. As the sacraments are the very reason of the existence of the Church our Lord's side was opened that from His very Heart might be taken His spouse, the Church, as from the body of Adam was taken the rib which was built up into his spouse, Eve. The Church then comes from the very Heart of our Lord, and the children of the Church must return to that Sacred Heart. All the work of the Church is directed to this grand result. All the sacraments, by the virtue of the Blood of Christ, are meant to take us in all the events of life to the Sacred Heart of our Lord. Even after death He does not cease to use His Sacred Body for our sake. He does not complete His passion and leave us to derive what benefit we can from it, but He sacrifices His body again and again for us. In Holy Mass He repeats in symbol this wounding of His body day after day, that we may take the lesson of it to ourselves. Our Lord will not allow me to forget the sacrifice of His life given for me, that I might be

induced to sacrifice for Him some little of my life, or be ready to suffer some mortification in my own body, and have part in the sacrifice He has offered for me. He repeats the wound in His side daily in Holy Mass, not only to urge me not to be too tender with my body, but to show me that it is in the sacrifice of my body that I may have part in the work of the Church for souls. There are many who appreciate the sacrifice of our Lord, and yet fail to be of benefit to other souls, because they will not imitate in their own bodies the completeness of our Lord's sacrifice. There are many who fail to do God's work in the world, because they will not give the sacrifices entailed in that work.

Even after death our Lord and Master is teaching us the spirit of mortification without which the greatest eloquence and the most beautiful words of prayer are of no avail. There are many reasons why the help I could give to others is withheld. Sometimes it is the excessive care I give to my body, as if that were the most precious part of my nature. Sometimes it is a love of ease or a love of sleep which must be mortified if I am to do good to others. My body is the drag on my effort as the minister of God. Whatever my failings may be, whether characteristics of my nature which I have inherited or induced by my own fault, such as quickness of temper, or over softness in my dealings with others, they need restraint, and the power by which I shall most surely overcome myself will be the use I make of the Precious Blood of my Lord in the sacraments of His Church.

I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy condescension in allowing Thy side to be pierced, that my faith may be strengthened, and that I may have courage to take part in Thy work for souls. I need these virtues if I am to make any progress in my way to Thee, and if my life is to be of any use to others. Strengthen, I beseech Thee, the faith Thou hast given me. Strengthen me also in the attempt to sacrifice myself for others. Thou knowest how blind I am to occasions of usefulness. Make me alert, as Thou wast upon the cross, to see and to help the needs of souls. In Thy great mercy let me no longer be blind and deaf in Thy service. Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest the needs of every soul, and Thou wilt give me a share of Thy knowledge if I give myself generously to Thy work. Open for me Thy side, that with the love of Thy Sacred Heart I may give myself without any thought of self to Thy service. Let me no longer be a selfish, useless disciple. Wash away my negligence in Thy Blood, and in the power of that Blood save me from myself. Amen.

XLV—Joseph of Arimathea

"Joseph of Arimathea (because he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews) besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus."—*John* xix, 38.

SHORTLY after our Lord was dead there came Joseph of Arimathea who had long been a secret disciple of our Lord, as was also Nicodemus who is associated with him, and he besought Pilate to allow

him the favour of taking down and burying the body of Jesus.

The evangelists each speak differently of Joseph. St. Matthew calls him a rich man, and tells us that he was a disciple of Jesus. St. Mark calls him an honourable or noble counseller who was himself looking for the kingdom of God. St. Luke calls him a counsellor, a good and a just man. St. John tells us that he was our Lord's disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews. From each we learn something of the character and position of Joseph. He was a counsellor, i.e., a member of the Sanhedrim. He was in a prominent position in that council. He was rich, and belonged to a little town quite close to Jerusalem. Lastly, he was a disciple of our Lord. St. John joins him with Nicodemus, and tells us that, like Nicodemus, he was in fear of the Jews. Thus we gain a notion of the character and status of Joseph of Arimathea which is fairly complete. He was a good, weak-charactered man, rich and of exalted standing. He had been secretly for some time a disciple of our Lord. He had sat on the council which condemned Him, but he himself had mildly opposed the condemnation, and had not given his consent to it. It was the custom for the relations to buy the body of one who had been executed, and the amount given was a perquisite of the governor. The disciples were unable to find sufficient money, and Joseph was led, no doubt, by the fact of his riches to do this office for our Lord. That would have been a sufficient reason for his intrusion on Pilate. When he came to Pilate, we

read that he simply asked for the body, and there is no mention of money. Pilate was accustomed to the lengthy execution by crucifixion, and doubted if Jesus were dead so soon. He sent a centurion to inquire, and when the messenger returned and reported that Jesus was really dead he agreed to Joseph's request. The boldness of Joseph of Arimathea has been contrasted with the cowardice of the Apostles, but the Apostles were not in a position either to purchase the body of our Lord or to deal directly with Pilate. Joseph is rather an example of the power of grace urging a weak soul to do what it can. His love of our Lord, so long kept secret, takes hold of him, and putting aside fear he does what is in him. He uses his wealth and position to perform this last act of devotion to our Lord.

A religious is capable of doing much for God if he will use the position which his profession gives him. Riches are not required, as in this case our Lord would not be bought, though Joseph was able to pay the price. He rewards the devotion of Joseph by using him to give us irrefutable testimony of His death, and at last rousing his too cautious love, so that the treasure of His body is handed over to him. Thus our Lord deals with souls. He waits, sometimes for years, and when the opportunity arises He claims a service which, if faithfully performed, will be the beginning of much valuable service for Himself. He is the example of courageous standing up for our Lord. Weak though he was and fearful of the Jews, his one act of boldness is rewarded with the grace to

make sacrifice after sacrifice for our Lord. First, there was the actual taking down of the body; secondly, the giving our Lord for a time his own tomb which he had hewn out of the rock for himself; thirdly, the costly sweet spices he provided for the burial, and lastly, a life-long service of preaching the faith of our Lord.

Thy rewards, dear Lord, are the graces to make greater and greater sacrifices, that the reward of heaven may be more complete. Joseph of Arimathea perhaps did not see when he took his first bold step for Thee what it would entail, but once taken he did not shrink from the consequences, and Thou didst not leave him without the grace necessary to give whatsoever Thou didst demand. Thus, the effect of Thy passion on this weak soul was that which I need so much in my life—a little courage to do what I can, for not to fail through fear may be the beginning of much future service for Thee. Give me, I beseech Thee, the courage Thou demandest. Thou art ever calling to me to take heart, to do what I can, and promising Thy support. Nay, Thou comest to me to give me part in Thy own courage. Thou givest me the advantage of a certain position, the help of education and the society of Thy friends to enable me to use all these in Thy service. I so often have not the courage to use the graces Thou hast given me, and then I complain to Thee that Thou makest use of others and findest nothing for me to do. Alas! it is my own cowardice which often stands in Thy way, for Thou canst not use cowards in Thy service. Give me then the courage Thou demandest, and if Thou wishest, make Thy claim upon my service. Amen.

XLVI—Thirteenth Station

Jesus is laid in the arms of His Mother

AS soon as Joseph of Arimathea had obtained leave to take away the body of Jesus he bought a quantity of fine linen, and Nicodemus joined him, bringing a hundred pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloes. These two assisted by their servants took down the body of our Lord from the cross. There is no mention in the Gospel of our Lady's part in this deposition, but the devotion and the tradition of the Church accustoms us to see our Lady with the body of her Son restored to her after it was taken down from the cross. Indeed after her station at the foot of the cross the "pieta" is the most common subject in the art of the Church which shows us the devotion of His Mother to the body of our Lord. This devotion is very precious to us, because it represents for us the object of a great part of our own lives. Our Lord's body was unrecognisable after the havoc that sin had worked upon it. So also our souls have been rendered unrecognisable as the images of God and the objects of His love by the many sins we have committed. The thorns which disfigured the brow of our Lord, and the blood and spittle on His face, the wounds and bruises on His body from the scourging, the wound in His shoulder made by the cross as He carried it, the wounds in His knees made by the falls on the way to the summit of Calvary, and lastly,

the wounds in His hands and feet and side had made of Him an object so different from Himself, that the prophet could say in His name: "I am a worm and no man." It was our Lady's work to remove all the defiling effects of the passion, and we may see her going through her work very thoroughly, leaving no trace which could not be a glory to His risen body. How lovingly she lived through the passion of her Son in great detail as she concerned herself with each wound! Thus can I see her cleansing His brow and smoothing out the wounds the thorns had made. The wounds themselves are the glory of our Lord, and these she does not wish to remove, but the defiling traces of blood and dirt which had gathered round each wound she most carefully removed, whilst her heart sympathised with Him and prayed for us, that the pride expiated by these wounds might leave us humble before God. She cleansed the eyebrows and eyelashes, that the look of His eyes when He rose from the dead might be what she had known, and that the compassion of His heart might be seen in His eyes. His mouth too she cleansed, that He might speak clearly again, and that I might listen to Him. The ears into which she had breathed words of love and words of prayer she now cleansed, that He might bend down again to hear my prayer and listen to all my petitions. Thus she brought back the Christ that was, as she wishes to bring back the soul, the child of God that was, though sin and negligence have changed that soul into an enemy of God.

All the efforts I make for the cleansing of my soul may be united to the loving work of our Lady in cleansing the body of her Son. The marks of her loving service should give the character to my attempt to rid myself of the defilement of sin. She was so thorough, so quiet and so full of love of her Son that she was enabled to give him back the same kindly and noble look which had been His all the time she had known Him. She restored to the bruised, wounded and defiled body the kingly presence which had belonged to Him before He offered Himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

I too must by her aid restore to my own soul the presence implanted in it by God when He made me, the presence He will look for at judgment. I must secure that He recognise me as His own.

Dear Mother Mary, help me, I beseech thee. By the devotion thou didst show to thy Son, by the care thou didst take, by the courage and thoroughness of thy love give me thy help. With thy assistance I can bring my soul out of the sin and defilement with which it is covered. I will trust thee in thy treatment of me; I will put myself in thy hands. Thou wilt show me how I can co-operate with thee. Thou knowest, dear Mother, how foolish I have been in the past, how persistently I have refused to act after thy example. I see now how anxious thou art to make the best of thy erring children. Thou showest me thy love in thy treatment of the body of thy Son. Alas! thou hast not merely external wounds and defilement to remove from my soul, thou hast deep

wounds to heal, and negligence and sin that have eaten into the very substance of my soul. Thou art able to help me if only I am willing to allow thee. Obtain for me the strength to do all thou wouldst have me do, that my soul which was committed to thee by thy Son on the cross may be restored by thy care. Let me not be so deformed by sin, that the good God who made me may not be able to recognise the work of His hands. Help me to become like to thee, that I may become more like to thy Son, and be sure of recognition by the Father. Amen.

XLVII—The Burial of our Lord

"And Joseph taking the body, wrapt it up in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new monument."—*Matth.* xxvii, 59, 60.

THE burial of our Lord's body is described in the gospels by the mention of four particulars:—First, that the body was wrapped in fine linen which, St. John tells us, was bought purposely by Joseph of Arimathea. Secondly, that it was surrounded by the sweet spices which Nicodemus bought, about a hundred pounds, consisting of a mixture of myrrh and aloes. Thirdly, that it was placed in a new sepulchre, Joseph's own, which he had hewn out of the rock, and in which no other body had been laid. Lastly, that a great stone was placed at the entrance of the tomb. Each of these, especially the first three, entail sacrifice. The fine linen and the spices would cost a considerable sum. The tomb was a prized possession.

The linen was to show our Lord's love of cleanliness. The myrrh and aloes manifest His use of ordinary means to an end. These spices act on the body by closing the smaller wounds of the scourging, and removing the marks of bruises, and generally making the body fit to contain the precious blood when this was returned at the moment of the resurrection. Our Lord could have completely healed His sacred body by His divine power, but He would work the healing by the use of ordinary means.

The new sepulchre shows our Lord's desire that we should each day of our lives make all things new, i.e., that there should be in the life of each soul a constant beginning in the spiritual life.

It seems probable that the sepulchre was only a temporary resting-place where the body was laid, because it was near Calvary, and there was need to bury the dead before the beginning of the Pasch. Thus does our Lord allow Himself even in death to consider the rules and the very prejudices of His neighbours. He would be buried after the manner of the Jews, that there might be no doubt of His death, and that there might be a number of witnesses. It is very probable that the chief priests had some influence in the hurrying on of the burial, and in this way they became guarantors of His death.

The manner of burial is of importance, for the use of the spices was not as among some eastern nations to embalm the body, but rather to preserve it externally for the short time it was exposed before burial. The mixture of myrrh and aloes was made up

into a roll in which the whole body was wrapped, and then bound to the body with the linen bands. It represents for us that external discipline which is a preservative against the corruption which threatens all human life.

Even in death our Lord does not cease to teach me the dependence on others, the use of ordinary things, and the value of external discipline. He wishes me to see the effect that all these things have on the life that is to be. He would have me imitate the generosity of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in my care of His body in the Blessed Sacrament, the tabernacle and all that pertains to it. The devotion of the faithful is shown in the provision in each church of a suitable tabernacle for the Blessed Sacrament, and the devotion of the guardians of our Lord is shown in the care they take to keep clean and as new the resting-place of our Lord. But above all, the preservation of the soul is secured by the generosity of service and sacrifice joined to the careful use of means at the hand of all to heal the wounds of sin, and to remove all the bruises of negligence. Thus, in every circumstance of the treatment of our Lord's body after death we may see His enduring love of souls. He is ever our example and our assistant.

Lord Jesus, trusting Thy body to Joseph and Nicodemus, teach me to act so that Thou mayest trust me. What a treasure Thou hast given me, for Thou trustest me with Thy Sacred Body in Holy Communion! Thou makest of my heart a resting-place to which Thou comest day by day. Thou art expect-

ing from me some new generosity, and alas! I receive Thee and give Thee lodging, but I do not often prepare suitably for Thee. There is little care on my part in giving Thee my heart as Thy own. Thou remainest so short a time, yet Thou lookest for a preparation such as Thou didst receive from Joseph of Arimathea. Thou makest it easy for me to prepare a resting-place for Thee. Thou requirest no great labour, no great expenditure of money, but Thou lookest for a generous heart. Surely I can give Thee a little time. It is Thou who bringest treasures for me, but Thou requirest a small sacrifice of time. Thou lovest the soul that is generous in giving Thee its time. Thou wilt supply the myrrh and aloes. Thou allowest me to be wrapped as Thy sacred body was in these healing spices, for it is I who need healing. I beseech Thee heal my soul when Thou comest to me in Holy Communion. Take away from me the effects of sin, the wounds and the weaknesses which sin has left in my soul. Wrap me also in the clean linen, that once more I may come forth cleansed and braced to a more generous and careful life than I have lived for Thee in the past. Amen.

XLVIII—The Seventh Dolour

BEFORE Joseph and Nicodemus could put the body of our Lord into the tomb they had to receive the consent of His Mother. This last sacrifice constitutes the seventh dolour of our Lady. She alone of all those present had rights over the body

of her Son. That right had been taken from her by Pilate and the Jews when He was crucified as a criminal. Now that Joseph of Arimathea had obtained the permission of Pilate the natural right of His Mother revived. Our Lord asked for the sacrifice of this right, and she freely gave it. He asked it for our sake and for the sake of all who were to believe in His resurrection. If our Lady had claimed her right and had had the body of our Lord taken to her own lodging it would have cast doubt on the reality of His death, and therefore on the miracle of the resurrection. Thus it was for the strengthening of the faith of all that our Lady made the sacrifice.

Again, she gave up her undoubted right, because she knew that many of those who would be called to serve her Son in religion would be hindered by the assertion of right which did not exist. Because she was to be the model of souls devoted to her Son she would complete the abandonment of self to God, and give up a real right. Her life had been one of constant abandonment. Her offering of herself was to be complete.

A soul claimed by God so frequently fails in this abandonment, because it will assert a right which it can secure by assertion from a weak superior. The intrusion of this way of the world is one of the reasons of failure in religion. Our Mother would show us that God can claim what He wills, and that the attitude of the soul should be, not what it can save for self, but what it can give for God and the friends of God. The devil began his revolt by claim-

ing the right of his exalted nature not to adore another creature, though that created nature was joined to and assumed by God Himself. So in all time his temptation of man is to assert self. Our Lady teaches us how to oppose the devil by relinquishing even what we might claim as a right. With God we have no rights, and it is dangerous in religion to assert any rights, even though they may be supported by argument.

Then our Lady shows us how ready we must be to give up anything which rests upon affection. She loved her Son better by not claiming to have the comfort of the presence of His dead body. In religion our Lord often asks His servants to put aside, not indeed the reality of human affection, but the external show of it, and He does not trust those in His great work for souls who are unwilling to put from them the external show of affection.

Therefore, in this seventh dolour our Mother gives us a practical example of the perfection to which her Son has called us. She teaches me to have regard in all I do to the faith in my own heart and in the souls of those with whom I come in contact. The spiritual life rests upon faith, and upon a great esteem for faith.

She teaches me also that the main sacrifice of religious life is to give up self and all self-seeking.

Moreover, she teaches me that I must be on my guard over external affection. If any one could have been safe in such manifestation, that one was our Mother Mary, yet all that we see of her in the Gospel

is quietness and restraint. The excess of affection is a disturbing element in some lives, and it interferes with that sane aspect which God wishes us all to have towards our friends.

I thank thee, dear Mother Mary, for the example thou givest me in this last sorrow. It cost thee much to let the body of thy Son be taken from thee, but the part thou hadst to take in the salvation of souls made thee appreciate the necessity for thy sacrifice. Thou didst most willingly make the offering even of this thy treasure for the sake of souls. Obtain for me the grace to have a regard to the same glorious will of God in all that I do. How often I think only of myself, and take no thought of the saving of souls! How little I allow my faith to control my desires and my actions! Give me thy own clear view of life. Give me some of thy oneness of view. Thy Son has said that if the eye be single, the whole life shall be lightsome. Thou showest me the meaning of this word in thy determination that faith shall be ever the ruling principle of thy life. Give me also, I beseech thee, thy help that I too may have some part in thy sacrifice. Make me ready to sacrifice myself. The sacrifice of self because faith demands it will bring me nearer to thee than any other act I can perform. Thy spirit of sacrifice won for thee the crown of thy life—the love and union in His work given thee by thy Son. In thy mercy let me have part with thee in thy self-sacrifice, that I too may be united to thy Son. Obtain for me the grace so to control my affection after thy

example that I may never lose the love of thy Son by my dealings with others. Amen.

XLIX—The Sepulchre

"Now there was in the place where He was crucified a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein no man yet had been laid."—*John* xix, 41.

ST. John tells us that the tomb into which Joseph and Nicodemus placed the body of our Lord was in a garden, probably an enclosure, close to Calvary, and that the tomb was new, and had been prepared by Joseph as his own tomb. The other three evangelists tell us that the holy women who had followed our Lord from Galilee stayed till they saw where the body was laid, for they had taken it as their part to embalm the body. Now it was the evening, and the next day was the Sabbath, therefore they would not come out to the tomb on that day. The thought of Jesus never left these faithful ones, and throughout the rest of the day they were busy collecting spices for the work before them. They rested according to the law, but their thoughts were all the time with our Lord, devising what honour they could pay to His sacred body, how they could minister to Him as they had done during the three years of His missionary life. This ministry for which they prepared was not needed, for our Lord was to rise again, and did not need to be embalmed; yet we cannot doubt that the devotion of these pious women was rewarded. They were slow to understand His words, for we can see how plainly He had foretold His resurrection. This ministry,

though not needed, was not lost for us ; it is a sample of the thoughtfulness we should have for the Lord who lies constantly on our altars. He is as if in a tomb, and we can do little for Him, but we can imitate these women who were so devoted to our Lord, and gather spices, not indeed for His body, for He needs them not, but for our own souls—spices which will keep our souls fresh and supple. And what are these spices ? First, myrrh and aloes. The gum of myrrh and the bark of the aloes, these represent mortification, and incense, which is for prayer and sweet oil for charity. This gathering of sweet spices is our ministry to the Blessed Sacrament when we cannot be in presence of the tabernacle. They show us the small acts of mortification, because our Lord is alone, and of prayer, because He is waiting for our advances, and of charity, because He loves all, and wishes us to be loving also for His sake. He wishes us to exercise self-restraint and a prayerful thought of Him during the day, as well as a charitable thought of others, because they are His friends. These virtues are the best preparation we can make for Him in the tabernacle. Each of these act on our own souls, and make us more fit to be in His company. Indeed, to visit our Lord after self-indulgence or neglect of prayer or charity will be of little use to our souls, unless we are ready to make reparation.

Moreover, the provision of these things does not depend on their use, and this is the fact with regard to many exercises of our life. Their use is in the quiet provision, in the readiness if the occasion arise,

but not necessarily in the actual use. Thus, the holy women, the friends of our Lord, had no occasion to use the sweet spices they had prepared, but still their visit to the tomb on the day after the Sabbath was blessed by God.

It is a very common fallacy in religious souls to think that the mortifications and long prayers and small charities of religious life are not of value, because the apparent occasions for exercising the virtues which are preserved by them are so few. Our Lord would have me know that He is pleased with my care, though He does not give me the satisfaction of the influence which, as far as I know, might be a danger to me. It is enough for me to be ready for the work; I must leave to Him to use me or to leave me as He wills.

Lord Jesus, give me, I beseech Thee, the grace to be ready for the work Thou mayest will to give me. How much I have neglected the preparation Thou allowest these holy women to teach me! I fail often in want of quietness. I do not give time to make myself ready for the work Thou offerest me. I see that Thou art pleased with the small things I can do for Thee. I see that the main work Thou askest of me is to make my soul ready and fit to be used by Thee according to Thy pleasure. The first gifts at Thy birth denoted the dispositions of the kings who came to honour Thee, and, as far as we know, their gifts were rewarded with faith. And at Thy tomb, though the gifts of Thy friends were not used, the givers were made the first witnesses of Thy resur-

rection, and the bearers of tidings even to Thy Apostles. My care then shall be, Lord, to make ready, but not to repine if my preparation seems to be of little use. I can trust Thee to reward even what Thou dost not use. Give me the self-restraint Thou lovest. Give me a great care over my prayer, that I may be in Thy hands to make use of me or to leave me as Thou willest. Give me also a great charity to all, that Thou mayest make me Thy friend because of the love I show to Thy friends. Amen.

L—The Guarding of the Sepulchre and the Descent into Limbo

"Sir, we have remembered that that seducer said, while He was yet alive: 'After three days I will rise again.' Command therefore the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day: lest perhaps His disciples come and steal Him away, and say to the people, He is risen from the dead, and the last error shall be worse than the first."—*Matth.* xxvii, 63, 64.

AS soon as our Lord's body was laid in the tomb His enemies began to fear His power. They remembered that He had said after three days He would rise again. They had rejected His prophecy as blasphemous, but now they began to fear that it might be true, and therefore they went to Pilate to beg of him to order a watch to be set, lest all their care should have been in vain. As they had been so cruel to Him they feared reprisals if He should rise again. They feared that He would gather the people around Him. Pilate who was wearied with all the

insistence of the Jews against our Lord would not now help them. He said to them: "You have a guard: go, guard it as you know." Our Lord is still the object of their hatred and fear. He is, as He has been from the beginning, misunderstood by the Jews. In the meantime whilst they are making the tomb secure with their guard and sealing the stone at the entrance Jesus has entered Limbo, bringing the news of speedy deliverance. Whilst the Jews are in dread of the earthly retribution for their cruelty our Lord is bringing the reward of hope to the many souls who have loved Him, though they knew Him only in prophecy. He goes to them to strengthen their hope and to inflame their desires.

In dealing with souls our Lord often allows them to wait for Him. In His wisdom He withdraws Himself from those who are strong to serve Him; He faces them with so many difficulties and such weariness, such lack of results from their efforts that hope is almost lost. It seems as if there were to be no relief. The desire for God grows less earnest and stirs the heart less strongly, though it never wholly leaves the soul. Then our Lord in His mercy comes for a moment to such souls, and the result is an increase of hope and a rousing again of desire for God which makes another long waiting tolerable. Sometimes it is in Holy Communion, sometimes in prayer, sometimes in ordinary circumstances or in the experience of another soul. Now if God submits me to this trial I must learn from the souls whom Jesus visited from the tomb in what attitude I must meet the trial.

What are my few years of waiting compared with the period that Adam, Noe, Abraham and David waited for our Lord? I must learn from them not to lose hope, and not to let my desire grow cold. God will keep His promise to me; He will not allow me to be tempted beyond my strength. But I must be on the alert to recognise Him when He does show Himself to me.

The joy with which the holy souls welcomed our Lord was intense. They were given at once the light of glory, and they understood our Lord as He is. Then the full meaning of their trials, their falls, their repentance and the mercy of God to them became apparent. They saw all in the loving communion with the soul of Jesus. They knew at once how worthy of their long waiting was the reward opened to them. Their own want of faith noticed by St. Peter, their cry that their Lord was long a-coming were at once turned into sight and into most fervent thoughts of welcome. All else was forgotten, and they lived and had their being only in the Son of God. One only had known our Lord intimately, though no doubt there were others who had known Him as a child. Now the report that these had brought to Limbo was verified and exceeded, for now, not only by the word of others did they know our Lord, but they were all taken into His soul, and they knew Him as God and Man. The desired of all ages was theirs. They were to be of His company till He Himself opened for them the gate of heaven. The time our Lord remained with the holy

souls was, we may well believe, till the moment of His resurrection, when with Him they would leave their place of detention, and accompany Him for forty days seeing all that they had dimly foreseen—the foundation of His Church, and the flow of grace over the whole earth.

So too, Lord Jesus, Thou art willing to come to me and show me even in this life the meaning and the value of all Thou demandest of me. I do not understand it at times, but I know that if I am patient and persevere there will come a time when all will be made clear. Thou art the answer to all my questions; Thou art the solution of all my doubts, the explanation of all my difficulties. In Thy mercy allow me to know Thee and to trust Thee even now. My heart grows fearful when I look not to Thee. My soul grows weary of waiting when Thou showest not Thyself. Let me know Thee as far as I can. Let me love Thee and trust Thee. Though trials are hard to bear, let me not lose heart, for in Thy time and with divine fullness Thou wilt let me understand. Thou hidest nothing that Thou wilt not manifest then. In Thy mercy let me not lose heart when the evil one suggests doubts about my faith and thoughts of distrust in Thee. He does so at times, and the trial is hard to bear, for if I cannot trust Thee, Lord, in whom can I place my trust? To whom shall I go? I will cling to Thee, Lord, though the devil bring fear upon me. Do Thou remember Thy weak servant, and enlighten my darkness, and strengthen my love. Amen.

LI—The Mother of Jesus after the Burial

THERE is no mention of our Lady in the holy Gospel after the words spoken to her at the foot of the cross, but the pious imagination of the Church has pictured her to us in the sixth and seventh dolours, the receiving the body of her Son from the cross, and then the giving it up again to be buried. From that moment even the imagination of the Church does not intrude upon her, yet there is much to be learnt from her as we may picture her between the time of our Lord's burial and His resurrection. This time covers about thirty-four hours—from about seven o'clock on Friday night till five o'clock on Sunday morning.

The heart of our Mother was not idle during that time. She would live again through the recent events—the last supper and all that St. John told her of the trial and condemnation of Jesus. Through it all she would begin that long act of resignation which was to end only with her assumption into heaven. The acts of loving care which had begun at the birth of Jesus, and had ended with the preparation of His body for burial had occupied her for thirty-three years. They had been interrupted somewhat during the last three years of His missionary life, but now there was a long period before her which was to be occupied by the two acts that complete the perfection of souls—the act of thanksgiving to God for

all that had been given to her and all that would be given through her, and the act of resignation to God's will, which demanded still further sacrifice of her. For the rest of her life these were to be the acts of her soul towards God, and rightly, because she most completely summed up in her life and character the virtues which were to bring so many souls to perfection.

We find by experience that according as the character of man is constituted the majority of souls reach their perfection either through resignation or through thanksgiving ; i.e., the dominant act of some souls is resignation, and of others, thanksgiving. It might be expected, then, that this most perfect soul, combining, as she did by God's design, in her own soul, all the virtues, should give to God these perfecting acts in a heroic degree. It is no intrusion into the sanctity of our Mother for us to whom she was given by our Lord from the cross to contemplate these virtues as she exercised them.

The thanksgiving for all that God had given to her is heard first in the words of her Canticle : He that is mighty hath done great things in me, and holy is His name. What these great things are we shall know only when we join her in heaven, but they will encourage us to join her now in her thanksgiving. Indeed, the acknowledgment of all that has been done for our Mother will enable us to acknowledge His hand in so much that has been done for us. As by the power of God she was commissioned to be of service to her Son, and through Him, to the whole world, so by the same power can we use the grace of

God, enabling us to be of use to Him and to all with whom He brings us in contact.

The resignation of our Mother is shown to us in that word to the angel: Be it done unto me according to Thy word; and in that word of hers to the waiters twenty-one years before: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." This resignation simply grew in perfection, and she could make her will one with God's, even though that will demanded the loss of her Son, not now for a few days as hitherto, but for years. Whatever favours our Lord gave her during those years did not take away the facts that He had gone and she was left, left indeed for our sake, but still left. The separation between Mother and Son was only in body, but in this order it was complete, so much so, that our Lord provided for her another who might give her those attentions and help which He Himself had been accustomed to give her.

In thy resignation, dearest Mother, thou teachest me to leave all things to God. "Be it done unto me according to Thy word," was thy answer to the messenger of God. And beneath the cross thou didst accept St. John in the same spirit from the hands of thy Son. For thyself thou art resigned; to God thou art thankful, and thy soul still magnifies Him.

Alas! how far am I from the thanksgiving, how far from the resignation thou didst practise! Yet I may hope by joining thee to gain something of thy spirit. Help me to see God's side in all that happens to me, and to thank Him with thee. Help me to see myself as in God's hand, and abandoning

myself to His will, to follow thee in thy resignation. How readily thou seest the hand of God! How completely thou didst resign thyself to His will! Thou didst not consider thyself. Thou didst see God's will in all, even when that will was hard to bear. Thou showest me that it is nobler far to keep myself out of count than to seek for myself even the company of thy Son. Thou wast safe in God's hands; let me, by thy example, learn to have confidence. How many repinings would be put aside if like thee I saw only God's will and were strong to accept it! Gain for me this great grace, the crowning grace of service here, the sure harbinger of heaven. Amen.

NOTE—Of the seven dolours of our Lady consecrated by the devotion of the Church three have no reference to the passion. They came to her during the infancy and youth of her Son. In order to complete the meditations on the dolours which find their place in the passion I add the following three meditations on the earlier dolours.

LII—THE FIRST DOLOUR

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

"And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His Mother: 'Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.'"—*Luke*, ii, 34, 35.

THE first sorrow of our Lady came to her when she heard the words of Simeon. When she took her Son to the temple to be offered to God according to the law, and because He was her first-born, to be

redeemed at the price fixed by the law, she was met by Simeon, an old man who had waited for the redemption of Israel. He, moved by the Holy Ghost, recognised in the Child Jesus the promised Saviour, and greeted Him in the canticle, *Nunc dimittis*, as the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel. He saw the look of wonder on the faces of St. Joseph and our Lady, and speaking to them he explained: "This Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign to be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." Thus, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost Simeon foreshadows the sacrifice demanded of our Mother. A sword was to pierce her soul, and the reason of her trial was that many hearts may have thoughts of resignation in similar trials, and may learn from her how to submit to the designs of God. Thus, the fact of her suffering and the object God had in dealing with her as He did are revealed to us. The very soul of the Mother shall be pierced, and the sufferings of the Mother shall enable her children to meet with fortitude, and to use in the praise of God the sufferings which are to bring to them the salvation of our Lord.

This first sorrow is the consecration of all suffering. Our Lady is made the guardian of the life-work of our Lord, especially of His trials and sufferings, and she is to be the companion of His death. This office is given to her that we may understand the sufferings of her Son, and make the graces won for us by her our

own. For, if this pure, immaculate Virgin Mother was to have a sword piercing her soul how can I who have deserved much punishment expect to be free from suffering? It is not to redeem us as her Son did that she suffers, but her suffering is rather to show me the value of suffering in itself. She has no sin to expiate, and her sufferings, as they are hers personally, do not redeem man, though she has part in the redemption by her close union with her Son. Yet the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of Simeon, foretells for her sorrow and suffering such as none of us shall be called upon to bear.

It behoves me, then, to examine how suffering may be borne in union with her. If borne rightly suffering has the effect of removing self-seeking, and of subduing the soul to the ordinance of God. Now the more excellent a means is for any purpose the more harmful its wrong use becomes. Thus, we find instances in which suffering turns a soul into itself, immersing it in self as if no other were to be considered, and at the same time making it rebellious against God. The view taken by the atheist because of the presence of suffering in the world is an utter denial of the existence of God.

My attitude towards suffering will indicate to me the reality of my imitation of my Mother; whilst the submission with which I embrace suffering sent me by God will put me under her patronage. Her part is to give me an example, and as my Mother, to relieve, as far as I will allow her, the pain I have to bear. Her relief will consist in giving me the thought

which will make my suffering profitable. As a fact, the thought with which my soul receives suffering from God is the main relief that is possible to me. It is not so much the lessening of pain as the increase of strength to bear it and use it which will make suffering profitable. I may gain this strength by the union of my pain with that endured by my Mother. She can no longer suffer, but she can understand my pain, and support me in endurance.

Thou art in thy first sorrow, dear Mother, designed by the Holy Ghost to be the support of the soul, and its relief when pierced by God by the loving dart of suffering. I see in the lives of the saints how many have advanced in sanctity through suffering. A large proportion have sealed their devotion to God by martyrdom ; and there are few whose lives we know who have not had to suffer many things for God. Thou art the Queen of Martyrs, because of thy own suffering, and because thou canst understand the suffering of others. Thou art also the Queen of confessors and the Queen of all saints, because of the long years of self-immolation in which thou didst accept the will of God and magnify Him in thy soul. Gain for me the grace to suffer, if need be, according to God's will. I can rely on thee, dear Mother, to help me. I have deserved many torments for my sins, and thou, sinless though thou art, didst bear for my sake the piercing of thy soul. Give me a place that I may find relief when suffering comes upon me. Let the thoughts which were thine be whispered to me, that by thy assistance and in thy spirit I may use in thy com-

pany all suffering, all pain, all difficulties, all perplexities which may come upon me. By thy aid the true meaning of God's will will be made known to me. Grant that the pain I have to bear may not turn me into my own self, but rather show me more and more clearly the love of God for me. Make me, I beseech thee, by thy loving care resigned to the hand of God. Amen.

LIII—The Second Dolour

The Flight into Egypt

"Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee; for it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him."—*Matth.* ii, 13.

THE second sorrow of our Lady was the flight into Egypt. The first came to her though the words of Simeon directed and inspired by the Holy Ghost. The second came to her through St. Joseph directed in sleep by an angel. The wise men had no sooner departed than Joseph was warned in sleep by an angel, who said to him: "Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee, for it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him." The sorrow to our Lady was the leaving Bethlehem, the place of her greatest joy, and the society of her friends, and going into a strange land where she had no friends and relations. The object of the flight was to save our Lord from molestation, persecution

and death. Probably Joseph and Mary had arranged to remain near the scene pointed out to them as the place of our Lord's birth. Bethlehem was near to Jerusalem, and so within the reach of many of our Lady's friends. Elizabeth, her cousin, had a house in the hill country of Judea, not very far from Bethlehem, and not a few of her relations were at Jerusalem. She is called upon to summarily leave all these, and fly into Egypt.

This is a sacrifice which our Lord demands of all whom He calls into religion. With our modern means of communication the leaving our friends and relations to enter religion and thus protect the new love of Jesus which has been given to us is not so easy a matter as our Lady's retirement into Egypt, nor is it usually so complete a separation. It behoves us to be on our guard lest the sacrifice demanded of us should lose some of its value from the ease with which its consequences can be avoided. It must be a very real separation, or much of the spirit of religious life will suffer.

The promptness of our Lady's response to the call of God is shown by the immediateness of the journey: "He arose and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt." There was no hesitation, but immediate obedience to the call of God. The main inconvenience to the Holy Family arose from the impossibility of receiving that sympathy and consolation which they might have expected from their friends and relations. They were removed from all, and were to stay for an indefinite time in

a strange land among unsympathetic neighbours, known scarcely at all by those among whom they lived. Joseph would support them by the work of his hands.

God makes the same claim on many souls in calling them into religion, and not unfrequently those who follow His call find themselves in unsympathetic surroundings. They have no choice of the companions of their life, and unless God's call and God's love be relied upon the difficulties become at times almost unbearable.

Yet we cannot be unconscious of the fact that in a sense the Holy Family were more thrown together, and were less interruptedly dependent on each other during their stay in Egypt than when at Nazareth. They were more all in all to each other.

So it is in the entry into religious life. Our Lord frequently rewards the first sacrifice by showing Himself more plainly and more intimately to the soul than He has done before. The newly professed have often a sureness of His love, the want of which was a real trial in the novitiate. He does not ask the sacrifice without a reason, because the love of relations and friends which has not been in Him is one of the most insidious obstacles to His love. The freedom of intercourse, the dependence on each other, the pride in one's friends, though all most delightful and valuable if they are founded in His love, are simply hindrances if merely natural, and not unfrequently are the reasons why a soul that has made the sacrifice does actually return by degrees to the

relations had before profession. In our Lady's case she had not to leave her closest relation, i.e., her Son, and in that fact she most perfectly reveals to us how the love of our relations and friends is to be made a help rather than a hindrance in religious life. My relations and friends must be received now in our Lord, and I shall find that this simple change of attitude will take all the harm out of my love. I thank Thee, Lord, for teaching me this great lesson, and for allowing Thy Mother in this second sorrow of hers to teach me how I am to deal with the love from which Thou hast called me into religion.

Thou, dear Mother, hast taught me how I am to answer the call of God. Do thou help me also to make the sacrifice with all my heart. Thou wast called to fly, not because thou wast not always faithful to God, but for my sake, that I, who have allowed my love of my friends to wind itself round my heart only by the natural bonds of affection, may learn to love all in the love of thy Son. The dulling effect of natural love upon the love of God was never felt by thee, but thou knowest it by the many times thou hast seen it in others. Do thou help me in the spirit of thy flight into Egypt to rid myself of all love that is not begun and supported and rewarded by thy Son. Then in my flight also shall I have Jesus, thee and St. Joseph to purify the love which would otherwise prevent me from attaining the perfection to which thy Son has called me. Amen.

LIV—The Third Dolour.

The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple

THE third of our Lady's sorrows is the only one which called from her a word approaching complaint. Jesus was now twelve years old, and on one occasion when the Holy Family went, as they were accustomed, to Jerusalem for the great feasts, as the time arrived for their return the Child was not with His Mother. This fact called for no surprise. The body of pilgrims from Galilee was considerable, and the children would be together, following now one part of the caravan, now another. Therefore St. Joseph and our Lady went for one day's journey; then they waited for our Lord to come and help with the tent and the preparation of the simple meal, but He was not there. Still they were not alarmed; they would go and find Him in the tents of their kinsfolk and acquaintance. With increasing surprise at His absence they complete their evening meal and then start out to look for the Child. At first they were without alarm, but after a fruitless search the extent of their loss comes upon them, and they return in sorrow to their tent. The light of their life has gone out. They begin to blame themselves for neglect of which they had not been guilty. They thought they had not taken sufficient care, and at once they remember many instances when on former occasions the Child had been absent and returned to them. They had not thought of Him as He deserved,

but their truthful hearts tell them that they had thought of nothing but our Lord during the whole day. Is this to be the end of all their care? With such sad thoughts they spend the night in prayer, striving to conform themselves to God's will. As soon as it is dawn they retrace their steps, weary, for they have had no rest, anxious, for they hear no tidings of Him from those whom they meet. Weary and foot-sore they gain Jerusalem, and at once on the same day of their journey they go from house to house of their relations and friends to which Jesus had been with them whilst they stayed in the city. They ask every lame man who is begging in the streets, for Jesus had been kind to them. Then as night comes they retire to the house of an acquaintance or of some relation of our Lady and there they spend another night in prayer and self-accusation, trying all the time to be resigned to the worst. In the morning of the third day they resume their weary search, and at last almost in despair they go up to the temple to give their prayers more effect, and there they find Him among the doctors in the porch of the temple, the centre of interest. His Mother at once speaks: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." She knows that He has a sufficient reason, but she does not know that reason. Her word is meant to claim an explanation, and not to blame her Son. She does not understand His words: "Why have you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" This business entailed the leaving of Mary and Joseph,

as the business He puts upon His friends entails at times the parting from their friends. Mary did not understand, but she accepted the sorrow, and she kept His words, pondering them in her heart.

The revelation of His life work was a slow process even to His Mother. This slowness is often a great trial to souls. They do not grasp the object of our Lord in His peculiar treatment of them, and they are inclined to complain to Him. He seems to allow them to live for a time in His company; they find Him in prayer, in work and in recreation, and then almost suddenly He withdraws Himself. The prayer is dry; the thought of Him in their intercourse with others does not occur to them, and the interest of work has no conscious connection with Him. After a time He brings to their minds the fact that He is not with them. If at such times the soul will put itself under the guidance of Mary in her sorrow it will find Him as surely as she did, either in the ordinary acts of life, in company of friends, or in prayer, but it must not expect explanation. I can give attention and a determination to seek till I find, but I cannot promise myself complete understanding of God's way.

Dear Mother Mary, let me accompany thee in thy search for our Lord. Give me thy hand, and lead me back to Him. Share with me the sorrow of thy heart. Let me not be indifferent. I cannot expect that He will be with me at all times, for I entertain Him so poorly; I am so inattentive to Him when He is with me. Do thou in thy kindness teach me how to speak to Him, how to love Him, how to attend to

Him, that if He withdraw Himself I may know how to find Him with thee. Let me seek for Him in some extra kindness to my neighbour, in charity to the poor, but most of all in my prayer. Teach me and encourage me not to omit any of my usual prayer. At times it seems useless to continue; our Lord does not allow me to find Him. Do thou, dear Mother, have a care of thy child, and preserve me from any negligence. I certainly shall not find thy Son in my carelessness and my want of trust. Give me some of thy own perseverance. Thou wilt have compassion on me if I lose not heart. Take me with thee in thy return to Jerusalem and in all thy careful search. Thou wast not led aside to any other object, and thou wilt help me to keep the one object of my search in my heart.

If I seek only Thee, Lord Jesus, Thou wilt allow Thy Mother to lead me back to Thee. Amen.

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